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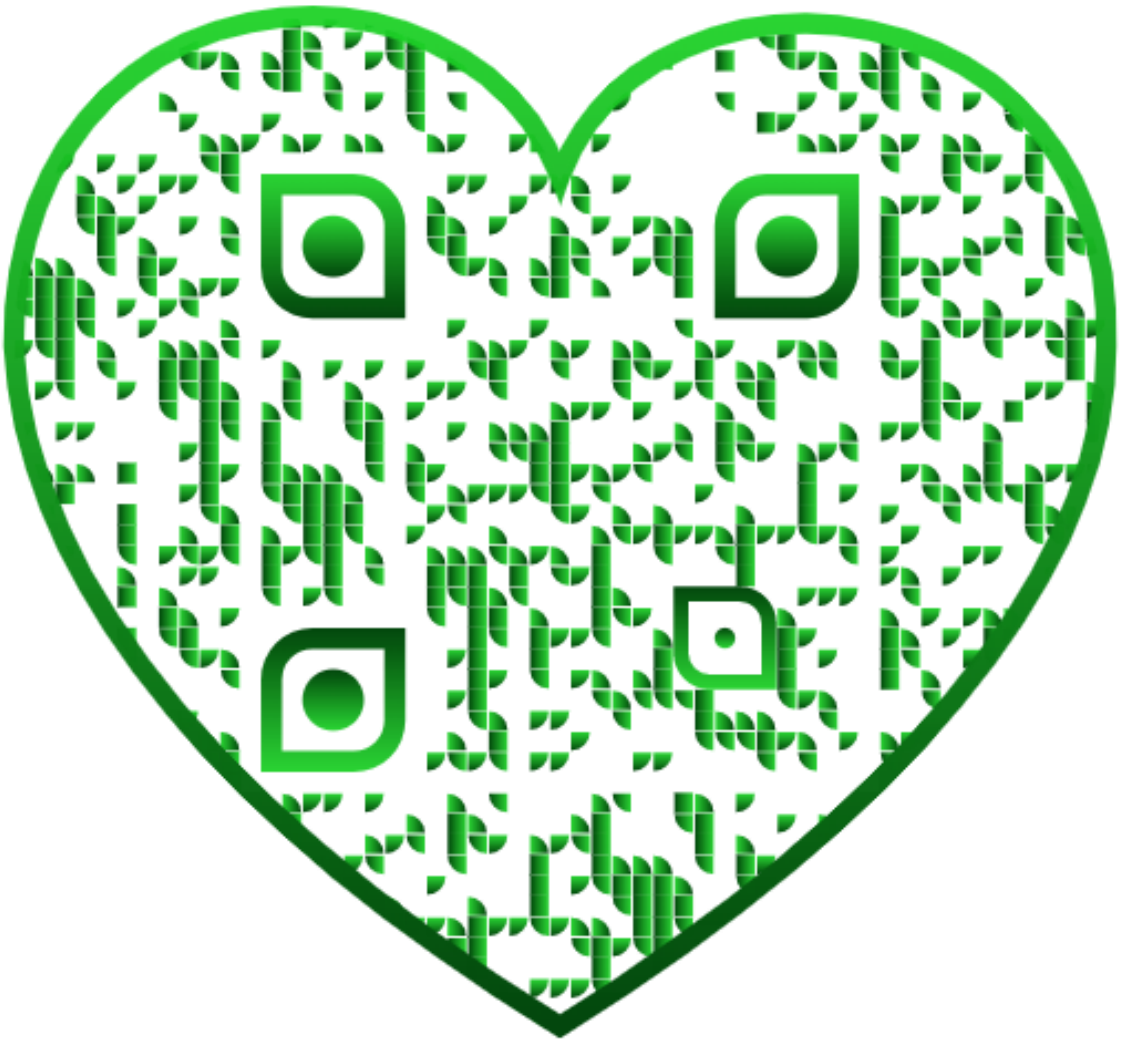

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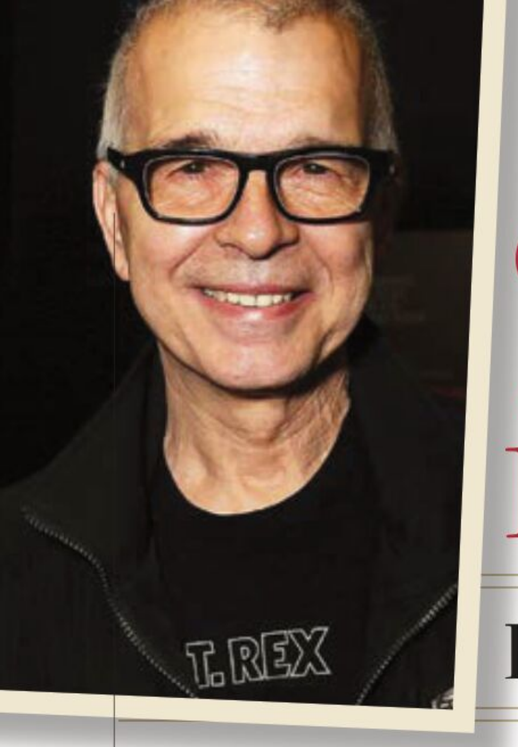

"There's a little bit of T.Rex in every rock group"

FOREWORD BY TONY VISCONTI

I WAS working for my mentor Denny Cordell, and he told me I should get my own band to produce. So I opened up the *International Times*, and they advertised a band that was playing regularly on the John Peel radio show called Tyrannosaurus Rex. I walked down Tottenham Court Road to a place called Middle Earth. I was mesmerised by the sound of his voice, it wasn't heavy rock, it was very gentle, and there were about 100 young people sitting cross-legged on the floor, as he was on the stage, instead of standing up and writhing around. It was an uncanny scene.

I thought his lyrics were absolutely magical and full of mythology. He bought me *The Hobbit* and *The Lord Of The Rings* and said, "if you're going to work with me you have to read these books because this is where I'm coming from." His melodies were beautiful and clever. He would flip from key to key in a very primitive way. I was very impressed with his musical acumen and his intuitive musicianship, although at the time I thought Steve Peregrin Took was the better musician of the two.

Marc was extremely ambitious, to the point of being ruthless. He had no problem standing up to authority. He would just stand there, all five foot five of him, and really be stern with people. It's amazing that he had these two people inside of him, a really hardcore businessperson and a dreamy writer of fantasy pop.

He used to come around to my flat in Earl's Court, where we were able to hear our mixes in stereo. Lying against my desk I had a Fender electric guitar. He begged to jam with it so we had many evenings where he and I would jam together. One night, the young David Bowie came up and the three of us jammed. That was the turning point, when he saw how much better his music sounded on electric guitar, seeing that he could make a more commercial sound that way. For "Ride A White Swan" he borrowed my Fender bass, and that was the big game changer, it got up to No 2 in the charts. Because we did it piece-by-piece the recording was exceptionally good – we took our time with the electric guitar sound, the bass, the tambourine, the claps. I remember going into the men's room off to the side of Trident Studios where we added the handclaps and a tambourine because the acoustics in there were incredible.

"Hot Love" was a massive hit, seven weeks at No 1 in most British charts. In New York we met up and did "Jeepster" and then [*backing singers*] Flo and Eddie said, "You got to come out to LA... we'll set you up with a studio," which was Wally Heider's. That's where we recorded "Get It On". Before we got back to London we heard from Marc's publisher, David Platz, he says, "'Hot Love' is still No 1 in the charts, we need an album." I said "I think we have the next single..." We rush released "Get It On" and that was the highest level T.Rex got.

MARC WAS EXTREMELY AMBITIOUS. HE HAD NO PROBLEM STANDING UP TO AUTHORITY

For the next two years it was just magic.

The Wembley concert was the epitome of T.Rextasy. It went straight to Marc's head. He already had a high opinion of himself, and his ego was growing to the point where he was starting to get extremely arrogant. He had these two faces – to the fans he was a darling, an angel. But he treated the rest of us like we were his minions.

Bolan in the studio with Toni Visconti: "He would stand there, all five foot five of him and really be stern with people"

I remember one night when we were doing *The Slider* at the honky château we took an hour and a half for dinner –they were bringing out this French Beaujolais, we were drinking. He came down from the studio at about nine o'clock at night and yelled at us, "I'm not paying you to eat, get up in the studio!" He was now paying his own bills so what might have taken five or six days to do in the past he tried to reduce it to half the time, which meant working around the clock for no other reason than saving him some money.

OUR group grew smaller and smaller and tighter and tighter. I asked him, "Why aren't we using [*backing singers*] Flo & Eddie anymore?" He said, "Oh, they copped an attitude with me... they wanted to get paid. You and I can imitate them." So that's us on "Telegram Sam" and "Children Of The Revolution". For "20th Century Boy" he recorded the backing track in Japan while he was on a brief tour. You could tell it didn't have the nice fat British recording style. I had to do a lot of work on that to give it some beef.

Marc was very busy touring, making a lot of money. Now songs were being written in the hotel rooms. He didn't take the time to go to the countryside to write songs, to develop them and play them with the band. It became a machine by '74. Self-aggrandisement ran throughout Marc's career and in the big period it was true, he was big, he was loved. "Hot Love" sold as much as 60,000 in one day. But when his star faded he was still big in his mind. It was very hard for him to accept he wasn't on the top of his game. I quit because of his arrogance, he just insulted too many people too many times in front of me. I couldn't take any more. I was working with other bands like Thin Lizzy and Bowie, I didn't want to make my whole life about T.Rex.

There's a little bit of T.Rex in every rock group. The Foo Fighters, U2. Marc taught people how you can use earlier formulas, the simpler the better, and reimagine them, dress them up. Marc was very smart. He was channelling Buddy Knox, Buddy Holly, Elvis, real standard rockabilly chord changes– he did his little twist on it and created the T.Rextasy sound. He's helped modern people go back and look at those earlier models. That's something Marc taught everyone.

DAVE JHOGAN/DAVE JHOGAN/GETTY IMAGES, JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

T.REX

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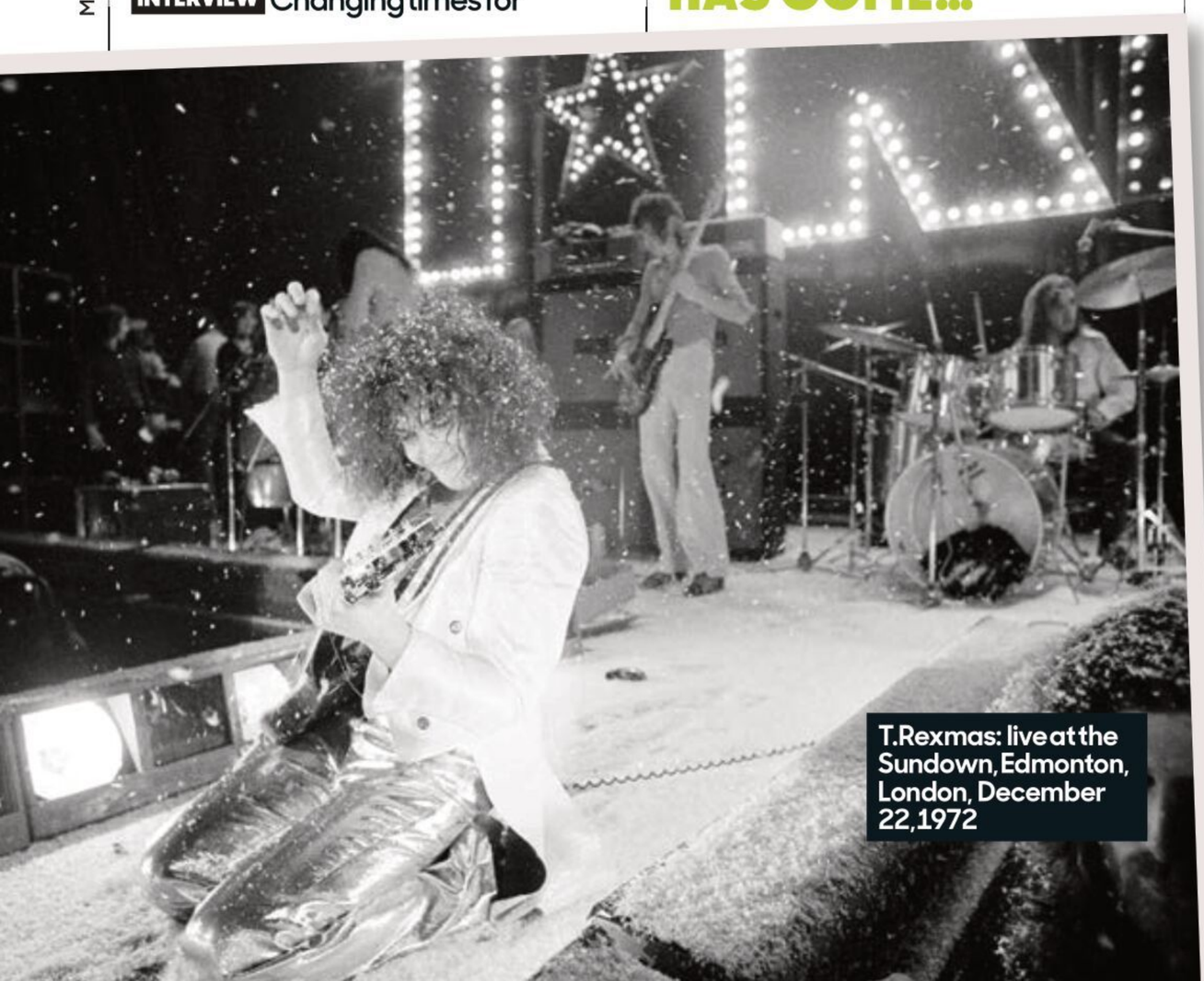

T.Rexmas: live at the Sundown, Edmonton, London, December 22, 1972

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES, EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES

Bolan, live with T.Rex in 1972

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MARC BOLAN
THE EARLY RECORDINGS

1962-1967

Actor, model, folkie, art-mod, natural leader: the many pre-Rex ace faces of a determined young 20th Century Boy. BY PETER WATTS

LIKE fellow 1970s superstars Elton John, Rod Stewart, Slade and David Bowie, Marc Bolan served a challenging and surely vexatious apprenticeship through the 1960s, watching enviously and possibly nervously as peers accelerated past him on their way to the sort of success and celebrity he'd long desired. Before forming Tyrannosaurus Rex in 1967, he'd tried out acting and modelling, changed his name a couple of times and recorded singles as a solo crooner and Dylan-aping folkie before enjoying a short period in a band that tried to out-Pretty Thing The Pretty Things. Even after that, he had a couple of years to go before his breakthrough. Bolan, though, was tough, shrewd and ambitious as well as talented. He never stopped trying, learning and making connections.

He had been born Mark Feld in Stoke Newington in 1947, young enough to avoid national service but old enough for rock'n'roll. Like Bowie and Elton John, he was something of an outsider – not just sexually but also because of his father's Polish-Jewish background. The young Feld worshipped Elvis and Chuck Berry and played skiffle – his teenage band, Susie And The Hula Hoops, featured schoolfriend Helen Shapiro on vocals. As a teen, Feld was a snappy dresser and would frequent mod venues like The Scene. In September 1962, he had his first taste of celebrity when he featured in *Town* magazine, interviewed alongside striking photographs taken by Don McCullin showing Feld and two friends looking like dapper gangsters from *Brighton Rock*. Feld, wearing a leather waistcoat under his three-button jacket, dominates both image and interview, demonstrating his cockiness and gift for language – "The stuff that half the haddocks you see around are wearing I was wearing years ago," he boasts – as well as trying to have it both ways by expressing support for CND and the Conservatives. The article raised his profile and Feld dabbled in acting and modelling, appearing as a teen tough in kids TV series *Orlando*.

Like Bowie, Feld was learning the art of performance in various disciplines before he applied them to music. This took time, and his first musical recording was a forgettable ballad called "All At Once" that he demoed in around 1964 and was reissued on seven-inch in 2008. Feld may have made at least one recording prior to this – a song called "Mrs Jones" recorded by Joe Meek in around 1963 is sometimes credited to Feld/Bolan, but it remains unconfirmed.

"Mrs Jones", if it is Feld/Bolan, is a decent tune and one that sounds much more like Feld's next '60s recordings than the schmaltzy "All At Once". Now calling himself Toby Tyler (the eponymous character from a 1960 Disney film) and heavily inspired by Bob Dylan, Feld returned to the demo studio in January 1965 to record a reasonable cover of "Blowin' In The Wind" and a stronger take on Dion's "The Road I'm On (Gloria)" (both appear on the fine *20th Century Superstar* boxset). It was enough to earn him a contract with Decca.

From this distance it seems odd that the young mod should be turning towards US folk rather than R&B, but Feld was nothing if not adaptable. The folk idiom suited his young voice and matched his desire to market himself as a solo artist rather than a member of a band. Even as a folkie, Feld was a cut above the scruffs when it came to fashion, sporting a Mongolian lamb suede coat, stylish knitwear and neat cap. In a contemporary interview in the *Evening Standard*, his manager Mark Pruskin noted with foresight that "his projection of personality is excellent. His image is a natural image – artistic but aggressive. People want to be like Marc: he's leading them somewhere."

FELD now styled himself Marc Bölan – the umlaut was chosen because "it looked French" (sic). The singer claimed the name was assigned to him by Decca, but there's a chance it was a contraction of Bob Dylan or, most likely, was borrowed from actor James Bolam, who briefly shared a flat with Feld and US actor Riggs O'Hara in Barnes. O'Hara was the titular subject of Bolan's debut single, a rather groovy slice of proto-folk-psych called "The Wizard" featuring session men Jimmy Page and Big Jim Sullivan that did well on pirate radio. It came out in 1966 and was preceded by several demos, including eventual B-side "Beyond The Risin' Sun", "Rings Of Fortune" (later recorded with Tyrannosaurus Rex), "Reality", the earnest "Song For A Soldier" and Fred Neill's "That's The Bag I'm In".

"The Wizard" was followed

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Try and catch Marc Bolan's self-penned 'The Wizard' – it has a most intriguing lyric, and his Sonny Bono-like voice is offset by a solid, thumping beat, strings and ethereal voices."
DEREK JOHNSON, NME, NOVEMBER 26, 1965

Mark Feld, October 23, 1965

EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES

John's Children, next to Fetcham Mill Pond, Leatherhead, spring 1967 (Marc, far right)

by a couple of further singles – 1966's jaunty "The Third Degree"/"San Francisco Poet" and his terrific original version of "Hippy Gumbo"/"Misfit" in 1967. Additional singles recorded in 1967 – "Sleepy Maurice"/"Cat Black" and "Hot Rod Mama"/"Sarah Crazy Child" – were released after his death, while another, "Horrible Breath", was recorded as a proposed jingle for toothpaste and eventually retitled "You Scare Me To Death" when it was released posthumously in 1981, with modern overdubs.

Many of these songs appeared on 1972's *Hard On Love* collection, which was reissued as 1974's *The Beginning Of Doves*. Several were recorded with Simon Napier-Bell, who became Bolan's manager in 1966. What appealed to Napier-Bell – and is apparent from the pre-fame recordings – is that while Bolan hadn't yet found the best means to express his style, he was a gifted and unusual songwriter with big ambitions, great looks and a decent voice. Napier-Bell decided to pair Bolan with a band he managed, John's Children, who had already released two

JOHN'S CHILDREN WERE THROWN OFF TOUR BY THE WHO AFTER PROVOKING A RIOT IN GERMANY

singles. Bolan replaced original guitarist Geoff McClelland, who had formed the band in Surrey with Chris Towson and Andy Ellison. Like Bolan, they cycled through names – The Clockwork Onions, The Few, The Silence – before settling on John's Children, named after bassist John Hewlett, who according to Ellison "couldn't play bass very well [*but*] looked good".

Inspired by The Pretty Things, John's Children developed a reputation for performative violence that featured fake blood, feather pillows and chains. The band cheerfully incorporated Bolan's Decca material into their set, along with other Bolan-written songs such as "The Perfumed Garden Of Gulliver Smith" and "Midsummer's Night Scene". This was a short but action-packed spell for Bolan. The anarchic John's Children were thrown off tour by The Who after provoking a riot in Germany and then played the era-defining 14 Hour Technicolor Dream at Alexandra Palace, where the old mod came face-to-face with the hippie future and went home with stars in his eyes.

In May '67, they released Bolan's Move-like "Desdemona" and recorded a follow-up, "Midsummer's Night Scene"/"Sara Crazy Child" (both written by Bolan), which was ultimately withdrawn just prior to release. Bolan's proto-glam "Mustang Ford" was also recorded and released under the new title of "Go Go Girl" in October 1967. By then Bolan had left the band – they were just a little too out-of-control for his tastes. His own four-piece debuted at the Electric Garden in July 1967 before he and drummer Steve Porter decided to peel off and form a freak-folk duo. Porter changed his name to Steve Peregrin Took and Tyrannosaurus Rex was hatched. ✪

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Mod times: John's Children just before going on stage to support The Easybeats at Tiles, 79-89 Oxford Street, London, March 24, 1967 - (l-r) John Hewlett, Chris Townson, Andy Ellison and Marc Bolan

"I HOPE TO RECORD AS A SOLO ARTIST"

The first music press sighting of allegedly puritanical "professional vagrants" John's Children – and more particularly their ambitious guitarist **MARC BOLAN**. But, as Marc concedes to **KEITH ALTHAM**, "as far as this group is concerned, Andy Ellison is lead."

NME | MARCH 18, 1967

JOHN'S CHILDREN, who make their chart debut this week with their own composition "Just What You Want – Just What You'll Get" (Columbia) are described by their manager Simon Napier Bell (also The Yardbirds' manager) as the first of the "anti-lust" groups.

With the exception of lead guitarist Marc Bolan from Wimbledon the group all come from Leatherhead in Surrey where they manage their own club, called The Bluesette.

Simon Napier, who enjoys sticking pins in the more self-righteous and exaggerated concept that the pop scene is now a hotbed of drugs, immorality and degradation, declares the group a permanent thorn in pop pomposity!

"They have already had a hit in the US charts with 'Smash Blocked'," Simon told me. "I wrote it and it was nothing to do with drugs or drink," he added indignantly, "it was about illicit sex! We came down against it."

The second of the group's "anti-lust" songs was "Not The Kind Of Girl You'd Take To Bed" which was an "anti-drug" song that Simon had turned down by the recording company who were apparently shocked any group should be so moral!

"Their next single is 'Thomas A Becket'," said Simon. "We decided to play safe with this and get right away from drugs and sex and into a good healthy murder. They wrote it themselves and it's all about a fella who goes mad and begins playing funerals in his back garden!"

On stage the group all use "Jordan" equipment especially made for them in the US and only used by top American groups like The Mamas And The Papas and The Turtles. They wear white stage suits and gold medallions although Simon is not sure why.

"I discovered John Hewlett, Chris Townson and Andy Ellison in prison on a vagrancy charge while I was on holiday in St Tropez," says Simon. "You might say they were professional vagrants. I bailed them out and discovered they were a group, and one of the conditions of my bailing anyone out is that they work for me for three years."

I SPOKE to folk singer Marc Bolan who lately replaced the lead guitarist, as they were rehearsing in London on Friday.

"We are writing and arranging all our own material on stage," said Marc, "and although I still hope to record independently as a solo artist, as far as this group is concerned Andy is lead and sings on the disc.

"Our club, The Bluesette, is a knockout — we choose all our artists. Last night we had Graham Bond and next week Simon Dupree.

"Apart from Andy, who is 21, we are all 19."

Simon describes his group as "completely arrogant, cripplingly honest, totally naive and four good clean healthy lads who sound like The Who plus blues!"

A powerful sort of combination!

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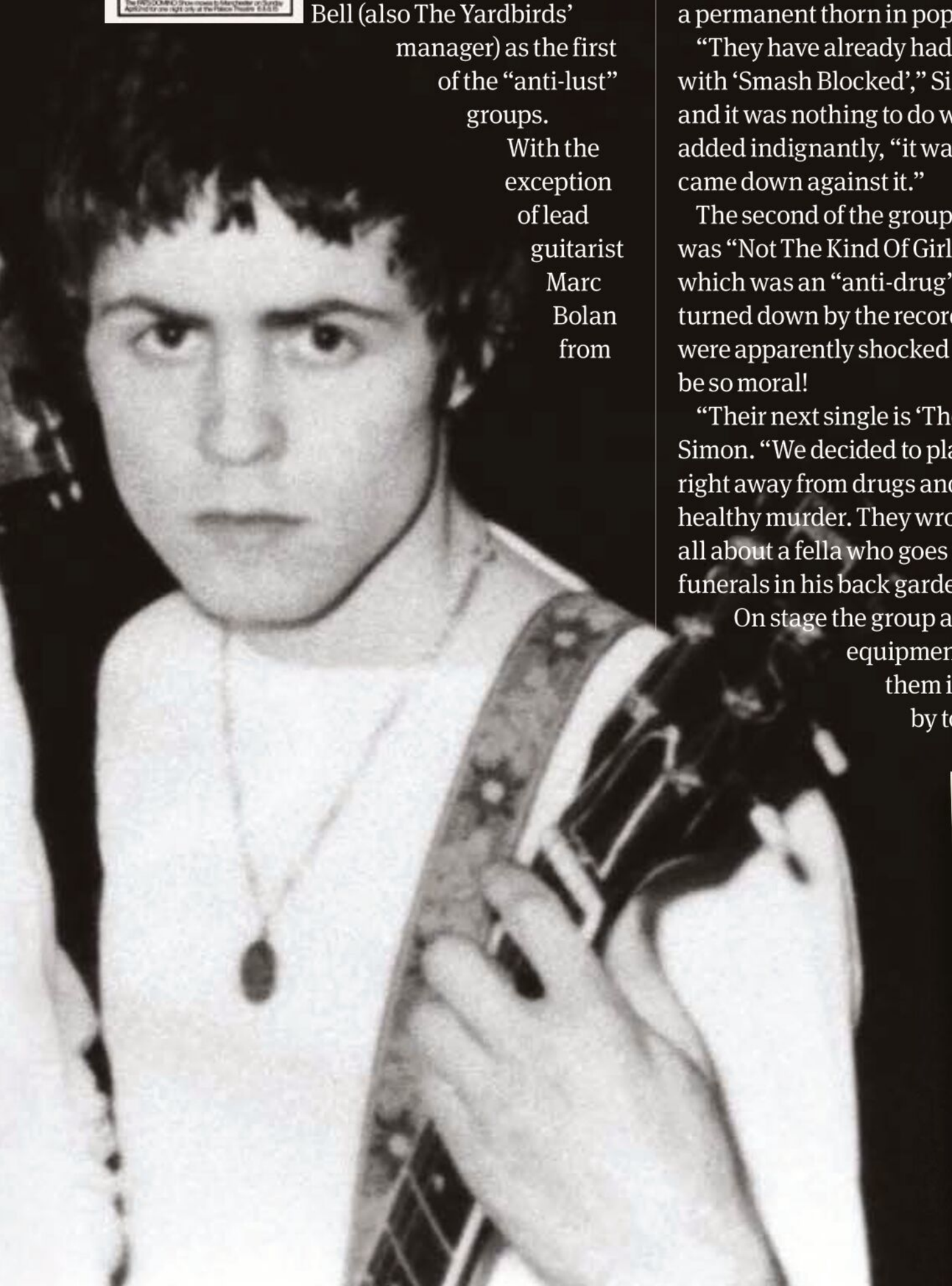


NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS * March 18, 1967

JOHN'S CHILDREN — FIRST OF THE ANTI-LUST GROUPS

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

MY PEOPLE WERE FAIR AND HAD SKY IN THEIR HAIR...

BUT NOW THEY'RE CONTENT TO WEAR STARS ON THEIR BROWS

RELEASED | JULY 1968

With Tolkien and Chuck Berry as his guides, a former mod – and his cross-legged associate – enter the English underground. His quiet, ramshackle debut essays arcane civilisations, Eastern atmospheres – even touching in with contemporary London. BY JOHN LEWIS

POP sensibilities moved fast in the late 1960s. In a little over two months, Marc Bolan had ditched the mod swagger of John's Children to tie his wagon to the hippie dream. It may have been a revelation prompted by what he saw at his last gig with the band, at the Alexandra Palace 14 Hour Technicolor Dream. Or it may have taken place a few days earlier – in Luxembourg. There, travelling back in disgrace from their abandoned German tour with The Who, John's Children stopped off at a Ravi Shankar and Alla Rakha gig – an event staged by the Indo-Luxembourg Friendship Society. Looking down at the Indian musicians, cross-legged on the stage, Bolan seems to have had a revelation about his next musical step.

A close listen to the first album by Tyrannosaurus Rex – a duo of Bolan and drummer Steve Peregrin Took – suggests it's far from a fanciful idea. On first hearing, it's true, you could mistake it for an impromptu performance by a Donovan impersonator at a Ladbroke Grove squat party. But, sonically, there's more going on. Bolan's frenetic strumming style recalls New York folk star Richie Havens, and there are traces of Bo Diddley's early rock'n'roll. Meanwhile, that Ravi Shankar/Alla Rakha influence has clearly taken hold: Bolan often takes open chords and moves up the fretboard, creating sitar-like drones. Took's hand-drumming is precise, rather austere and weirdly experimental, not dissimilar to that of a classically trained Hindustani percussionist.

Nowadays, Tony Visconti – who produced this and Bolan's next eight albums – sees the album as a bit of a low-budget mess, but you can see how he gives a sense of focus to this chaos. The guitars are recorded clean, the tempos don't fluctuate as much as they do live, and Took's percussion never goes too off-piste. And Visconti ensures that Bolan's extraordinary voice is foregrounded. It's a wobbly, androgynous tenor that switches between American-accented bluesy phrases and the rather quaint, very English declamations of a Syd Barrett or a Kevin Ayers. There is also a unique warble at the end of each line that had never really been heard in pop music before – the sound that it most resembles, oddly, is the Bedouin ghaita horns you'll hear on Master Musicians Of Joujouka recordings.

Bolan and Took had spent late 1967 performing at little "happenings" around London and being championed by the counterculture's prime representative on British radio, John Peel. Search the internet and you'll find an October 2, 1967 appearance at Middle Earth in Covent Garden that was recorded by Dutch TV and introduced by Peel, who tells us that Bolan "sings gentle, soft little songs that are very beautiful". A month later Peel invited Tyrannosaurus Rex to record a session for his new BBC Radio 1 show *Top Gear*, featuring versions of "Scenescof", "Child Star", "Red Hot Mama" and "Highways" (aka "Misty Mist"). Within weeks, Bolan had been introduced to Tony Visconti. "If you're gonna record me, you gotta read these," the 20-year-old Bolan apparently told him, thrusting copies of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord Of The Rings* into his arms.

Bolan's lyrics throughout this album – not least its Tom Bombadil-inspired title *My People Were Fair And Had Sky In Their Hair... But Now They're Content To Wear Stars On Their Brows* – certainly draw from those JRR Tolkien books, as well as those by Tolkien's Oxford contemporary CS Lewis. But Bolan succeeds in inventing a whimsical argot ransacked from multiple literary registers. The cover illustration, by David Bowie's friend George Underwood, features a fantasy art inspired by Gustave Doré, and the lyrics talk of fauns and pixies and trumpet-playing dwarfs; there are *"elvish fingers"* and references to Lilliput, sunken galleons and musty muskets.

There are also punning compound nouns and palindromes like *"ladagun"* and *"deborarobed"*. "Scenescof" introduces a

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Do not adjust your record player, this is how Marc Bolan and Steve Peregrin sing – as if they are about to break out crying."
ALLEN EVANS, NME, JULY 20, 1968

"The attraction of this simple duo lies in their simplicity, fun and beauty. Marc's lyrics make pretty poetry. And they wrap the strength of rock'n'roll around them on songs like 'Mustang Ford' and 'Hot Rod Mama', revealing Marc's penchant for early pop."
CHRIS WELCH, MELODY MAKER, JULY 20, 1968

MY PEOPLE WERE FAIR AND HAD SKY IN THEIR HAIR

TRACKMARKS

1 Hot Rod Mama ★★★
2 Scenescof ★★★
3 Child Star ★★★
4 Strange Orchestras ★★★
5 Chateau In Virginia Waters ★★★★
6 Dwarfish Trumpet Blues ★★★
7 Mustang Ford ★★★
8 Afghan Woman ★★
9 Knight ★★
10 Graceful Fat Sheba ★★
11 Weilder Of Words ★★★
12 Frowning Atahuallpa (My Inca Love) ★★

Label: Regal Zonophone
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Advision Studios, New Bond Street, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals and guitars), Steve Peregrin Took (backing vocals, drums, pixiphone glockenspiel, percussion), John Peel (spoken word)
Highest chart position: UK 15 (reached No 1 on re-release in 1972 as a double-LP reissue with *Prophets Seers & Sages The Angels Of The Ages*); US –

villainous character – one who later recurs in later Bolan songs – an anti-hippie nemesis who is presumably "scoffing" at the "scene". Bolan also drops in exotic-sounding places from around the hippie trail. The raga-tinged "Afghan Woman" is a two-chord chant in praise of a fallen Afghan princess, now *"clad in sacks of linen, living 'neath your waterwell"*. Over a dreamy tangle of chords, the rather lovely "Chateau In Virginia Waters" mentions Venetian mothers, art dealers from Havana and Socrates. The album's final track "Frowning Atahuallpa (My Inca Love)" references a 16th-century Inca emperor before going into a lengthy Hare Krishna chant.

At the same time, Bolan can't resist tapping into the more primal mainstays of rock'n'roll. The LP opener "Hot Rod Mama" (a song he wrote for John's Children) is an orthodox 12-bar boogie that takes us on a

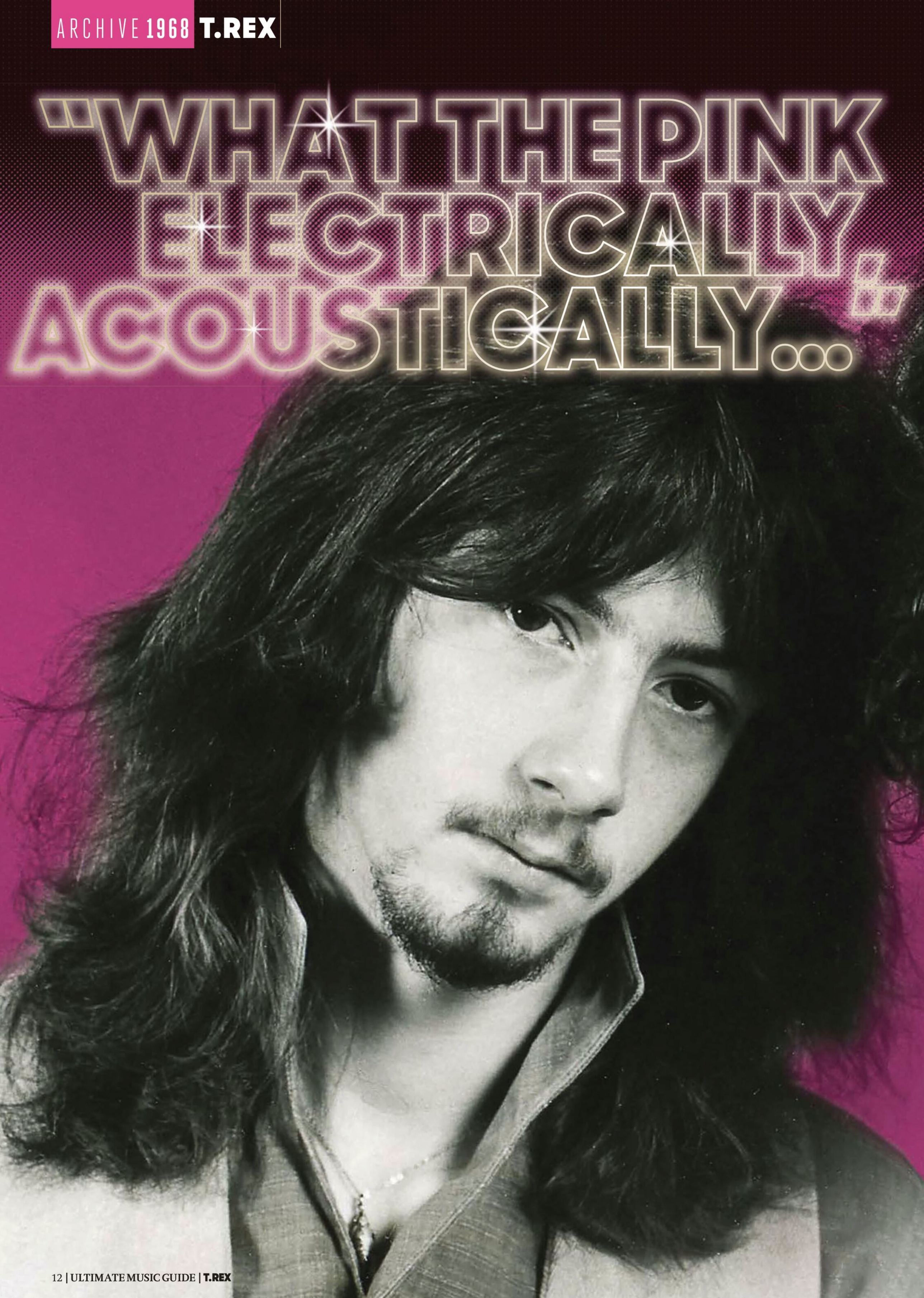
A SERIES OF QUIET, LOW-VOLUME, MINIMALIST MINIATURES, FEW MORE THAN THREE MINUTES LONG

voyage through the arcana later depicted in *American Graffiti* – hot rods, greased-up Levi's, baseball boots and an *"ice-cream Mustang"*. On "Mustang Ford" (another John's Children leftover) Bolan takes a Chuck Berry-inspired incantation to the motor car – one with a feature possibly unknown to most auto mechanics called a *"boogity carburettor"* – through an Indian raga filter.

THERE is also bathos, where Bolan's dreamworld crashes into quotidian London. "Graceful Fat Sheba" appears to be a surreal paean of praise to a female butcher (*"sweating behind the meat counter/Her skin it leaks liquid, the odour is* sickly") – a piece of elliptical poetry pitched between Ted Hughes and Ken Loach. On the minimalist "Weilder (sic) Of Words", he crowbars mention of a *"moonlit laundromat"* among his surreal sketch of what sounds like a dissolute dandy called Robard de Font Le Roy, whose shabby gentility is marked by his *"dented top hat"*, *"busted cheroot"* and *"sleek astrakhan"*. The short story that John Peel reads at the end of the album is a pastiche of *The Wind In The Willows*, but one where "Kingsley Mole" ends by kneeling on soft soil and making a morning prayer to the Egyptian sun god Ra – *"not even caring if he dirtied his yellow Rupert trousers"*.

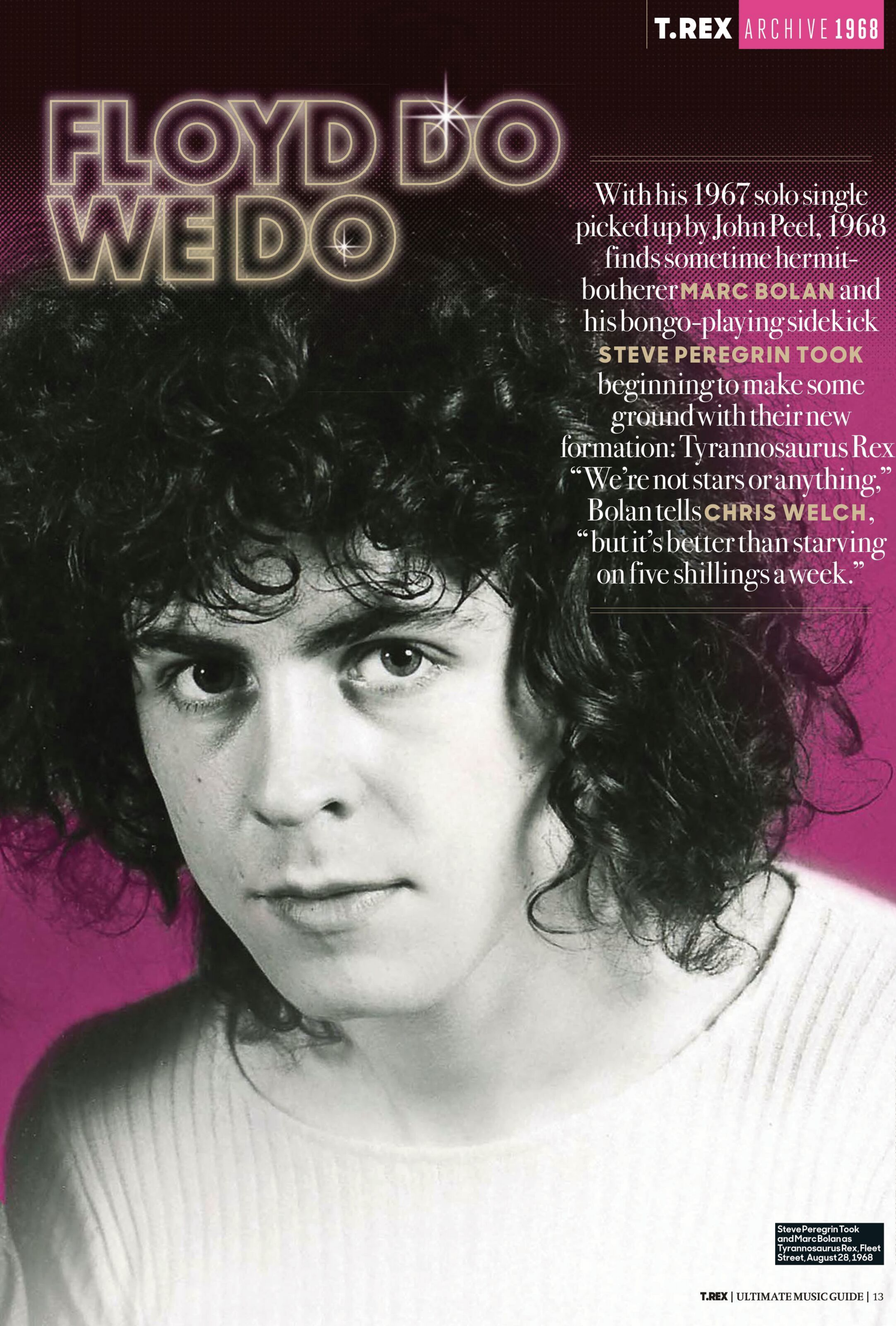
This was music that fitted into the spirit of the age, but it was unlike anything else from this period. This wasn't expansive psychedelic rock with lengthy jam sessions – it was a series of quiet, low-volume, minimalist miniatures, few of them more than three minutes long. If Bolan was entering the underground, he was doing so on his own terms. ✪

"WHAT THE PINK ELECTRICALLY, ACOUSTICALLY...



FLOYD DO WE DO

With his 1967 solo single picked up by John Peel, 1968 finds sometime hermit-botherer **MARC BOLAN** and his bongo-playing sidekick **STEVE PEREGRIN TOOK** beginning to make some ground with their new formation: Tyrannosaurus Rex. "We're not stars or anything," Bolan tells **CHRIS WELCH**, "but it's better than starving on five shillings a week."



Steve Peregrin Took and Marc Bolan as Tyrannosaurus Rex, Fleet Street, August 28, 1968

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO / TONY GALE

MELODY MAKER | MAY 25, 1968

AGE and world weariness are the enemies of pop. Marc Bolan has youth and enthusiasm. His are the qualities which must be the saviours of a music scene going through a distinct creative depression.

Gloom and despair were my main feelings one day last week whilst mulling over a thimble of tomato juice in a Fleet Street hostelry.

"Woe is me," I cried out, drawing icy glares from a bowler-hatted gent smashing beer down his throat. "Pop is dying," I groaned, stubbing out a cigarette on the palm of my left hand.

Suddenly, in bounced Tyrannosaurus Rex, turning darkness into light. But this illuminant was no towering beast with slavering jaws thought extinct millions of years ago.

Marc, aged 20 with black curly hair and the quiet assurance of Donovan, plays his own songs to acoustic guitar accompaniment. His sole supplier of rhythm is the other half of Tyrannosaurus Rex – Steve Peregrin Took, who plays conga drums, bongos and vitamin pill tins.

Between them, they are whipping up a highly original sound, championed by Radio One's John Peel, and fast becoming the rage of the university circuit. Marc calls it "Youth Music" and its influences are multifarious – including the driving simplicity of early pop classics like "Duke Of Earl" by Gene Chandler.

Rex's first record "Debora" is delighting hippy poppers (how's that for a sordid new phrase?).

"The BBC don't like the single," said Marc, wisely refusing offers of cigarettes and drink. "John is the only guy who plays it, but it's selling very well. It's a simple production because we like to sound as we do 'live'. We did 'Debora' in two takes after completing our first album."

MARC has vague roots. There are rumours of him doing modelling work, living in Paris and occasionally joining odd groups like the now defunct John's Children. How did his unique duo evolve?

"I freaked out of the John's Children thing after they released a record called 'Desdemona'. I had no bread – nothing. Then I met Steve. He stayed at my flat and there were some bongos lying around. He started playing to the songs I was writing.

"At this time John Peel played a record called 'Hippy Gumbo' I made two years before, on [*Radio show*] *Perfumed Garden*. I went to meet John and we started doing things at London's Middle Earth for two pounds ten a gig."

"Then we did [*another Peel radio show*] *Top Gear* and we got lots of nice letters. Producer Tony Visconti heard us, and we went with Regal Zonophone. It's all built up from there.

"It's a gas. I can hardly believe what's happening. We play universities, and on June 3 we are playing a concert at the Royal Festival Hall with Roy Harper and Stefan Grossman. David Bowie will be doing some miming.

"I don't know how big we can get. I just enjoy playing. I play every day and it makes me feel happy. The fact that we are getting paid £150 a gig is a gas. We're not stars or anything, but it's better than starving on five shillings a week."

simplicity into the mainstream of events.

From the West Coast to London, groups are attacking our consciousness with heavy armaments ranging from Mellotrons to eight-track recording machines. Marc is offering acoustic guitar, while his mate, Steve Peregrin Took, "bangs away on a drum".

Their music often sounds like a Buddy Holly demo disc. Yet it is charming thousands of hippies, selling LPs, and the tiny duo have already been invited to tour America in the autumn.

Marc is tasting success for the first time. In the past he has been involved in pop groups where he was unhappy and unfulfilled. Now he has hit on a formula so simple, many must be kicking themselves for not having thought of it before.

Bolan appeared for our talk wearing a red and black striped school blazer, with holes in the elbows, that had belonged to his first girlfriend. He seemed about four feet high, but has probably a few more inches than that. He was peering up at a copy of his album, displayed in a record store window.

"I feel like a star now," he said, as we adjourned for refreshment.

How did Marc feel about his measure of success?

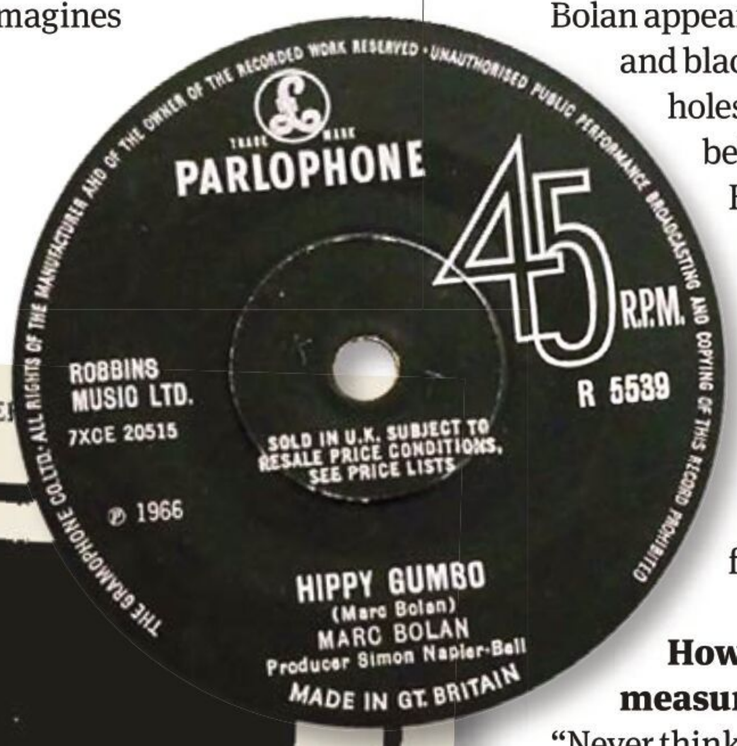
"Never think about it. It's funny... initially Tyrannosaurus Rex was a five-piece electric group for a week. But it never got properly rehearsed. I couldn't amass enough energy to turn them all on to what I wanted. With Steve, it's very easy because he thinks the same way I do. Steve just picks up a drum and bangs away. What the Pink Floyd do electrically, we do acoustically. Steve improvises and I'm

MELODY MAKER | JULY 27, 1968

"I CAN'T really get hung up on a pop ego thing. God is a good thing and if I started to believe I was a splinter of God's head, I'd be zapped, and mown down with lightning. And what good would that be? I'd never get in the chart then!"

One half of Tyrannosaurus Rex talking. Marc Bolan. Black curly hair. Smiles a lot. Hides under bedsheets and imagines Technicolor movies.

Marc aged 20 seems 15, and in a time of growing complexity in the name of pop progression, injects



MELODY MAKER

MARC BOLAN— THE MAN BEHIND TYRANNOSAURUS REX

AGE and world weariness are the enemies of pop. Marc Bolan has youth and enthusiasm. His are the qualities which must be the saviours of a music scene going through a distinct creative depression.

Perfumed garden: Bolan and Took in '68 at the parental home of Hermione Farthingale – then David Bowie's partner. Woolworth's centurion breastplate, model's own

learning to improvise. Through playing so much.

"I don't claim to be a guitarist, but I've got flaming hands and bleeding fingers. I steer the guitar like a ship, and sing with my eyes closed. When I'm bopping it feels great. But I can't see what I'm doing and the microphone often falls into the hole in the guitar.

"I like having my eyes closed, I like watching the pictures. I used to watch whole films in bed under the sheets. They are better than dreams. The true dream is living."

Apart from dreams, what are Marc's more tangible achievements at the moment?

"Our next album is finished and the next single is going to be 'One Inch Rock' with 'Salamanda Palaganda'.

"'One Inch Rock' is about a man who meets a woman who takes him home and strips off for him. She offers a drink. It makes him one inch tall and she puts him in a bottle with another girl. They get bored and do a dance. No, I shouldn't think the rockers will dig it! It will only hang them up. The only relation we have with the past and rock is energy. All we are about is energy, and soft emotions. I am now getting much more fulfilment out of writing than performing. I'm older and I'm maturing – like cheese or something. I can't stop writing. I wrote four poems last night."

"I get a stream of inspiration and my hand writes away, and the words don't always make sense. They fit like an abstract painting. I spell very badly and my handwriting is childish, but

"IF I STARTED TO BELIEVE I WAS A SPLINTER OF GOD'S HEAD, I'D BE ZAPPED AND MOWN DOWN WITH LIGHTNING"
MARC BOLAN

I enjoy writing and getting words and music together. I get giggly and knocked out."

Does Marc's dream world get threatened by violence? How does he cope with the nasties?

"The only unpleasantness we had was in the early days at Tiles Club, when John (Peel) was doing a *Perfumed Garden* thing. All the heavies were there. Sad thuggies who wanted to beat John up."

Is Marc afraid of the violence they might meet in America?

"Well, I lived in Tooting for four years. No, I'm not afraid. There's violence everywhere. I went into a Greek restaurant and two people said: 'Is that a boy or a girl? No, it's an animal.' It was said with such bitterness.

"I can't really believe anybody can be called a pop star. There is no such thing. You might exist as one on a photograph, but it's never you. Violence doesn't bug me. When I was a kid it was always rough. I just believe in strength of the spirit. If somebody wants to have a knuckle with you, it's their scene. You get lots of nasties. You can be a gangster, and be cool about it. Rogues are very good. Scavengers are very bad."

Original question. Would success spoil Marc Bolan?

"If I get a hit I'm changing my name to Zinc Alloy and going to wear an aluminium suit."

RAY STEVENSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

PROPHETS, SEERS & SAGES

THE ANGELS OF THE AGES

RELEASED OCTOBER 14, 1968

With the duo literally setting up camp in Trident Studios, Tony Visconti adds definition to Bolan's catchy cosmic vision, plucked fresh from Gandalf's Garden. BY JON DALE

IN 1968, the duo of Marc Bolan and Steve Peregrin Took were working at a fair clip – it only took Tyrannosaurus Rex three months to follow up their debut album. Adopted as one of the core groups in London's underground, they were playing gigs and happenings regularly, including what must have felt like an ongoing stand at Middle Earth – on May 19, for example, they played the appropriately named Gandalf's Garden Benefit – and they'd been taken under the wing of broadcaster John Peel, whose symbiotic relationship with Bolan, in particular, would shepherd the latter through this first, formative part of his career. (Bolan in turn gave the Peel household two hamsters, named Dandelion and Biscuit. As one does.)

The support of Peel as Bolan entered this more productive phase of his creativity was paramount too, as beyond the DJ and a few other outliers like 'Whispering' Bob Harris, Bolan struggled to make many converts among journalists or broadcasters. This was possibly due to a whiff of insincerity that some people caught from Bolan; always a calculated artist to some degree, observers thought him a fake in hippie's clothing. For Tony Visconti, who would also take the duo under his wing, Bolan's hippie gumbo was part hipster pose, part devoted engagement with the mysteries of the universe. "He never did hallucinogenic drugs, but he certainly dressed the part," Visconti told Marc Burrows.

Bolan also had a surprising knack for a great pop tune – see the stumbling toytown blues of "One Inch Rock", released in August and reaching No 28 in the UK. The single preceded their second album, *Prophets, Seers & Sages...* which at first felt like more of the same, but if you were paying careful enough attention the natural pop intelligence of "One Inch Rock" was a signal of what was to come, a few years down the track, once the hippie dream died.

To record their second album, Bolan and Took traipsed off to Trident Studios in Soho, London, and set themselves down in a corner of the expansive studio. It must have been a surreal, if not ludicrous, sight for the engineers and studio help who frequented the building – two elven weirdos bunkered down with a guitar and a rickety collection of tinker-toy percussion to hand. But part of Tyrannosaurus Rex's charm was their capacity to disarm, and there's something symbolic about these underground figures finding their way into the studio that birthed The Beatles' "Hey Jude" that same year. The sessions took place from April to August of 1968, starting in the early afternoon and meandering into the late evening. They may have looked a motley duo, but as producer Tony Visconti notes, Bolan was "the most focused artist I've ever worked with".

Visconti's goal, then, must have been to get all of the quirk and the charm down on tape – recalling how he felt when he first encountered Tyrannosaurus Rex, seduced by their weirdness, he said, "It certainly wasn't rock'n'roll, and then again it wasn't folk; it was eccentric and new." Indeed, much as people consider albums like *Prophets, Seers & Sages...* part of the mystic hippie miasma of the times – Incredible String Band, COB, Jan Dukes De Grey – they're distinctly separate from that trajectory; the pop smarts that Bolan inherited from his time in John's Children are evident in the songs' straightforward structures, the lyrics elliptical yet evocative and naggingly catchy.

Prophets... opens with a fabulous sleight of hand, a revisitation of Tyrannosaurus Rex's debut single "Debora", split in two and rendered backwards for its second half: here's Bolan the skewiff structuralist, applying mathematical precision to decidedly other ends, the result being "Deboraarobed". Reversing the tape was just one of Bolan's tactics to fill out the sound here, such that Visconti

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"They have a quivering and tremulous style of singing which is different. Marc Bolan's beautiful lyrics almost compensate for the rather unmelodic arrangements."
ALLEN EVANS. NME, NOV 23, 1968

"Whether one understands Marc's message or not, he and Steve have hit upon the simplest and most effective recording sound in history. A mere acoustic guitar ambles merrily, while bongos plink and plonk like gnomes tap dancing on flowerpots..."
MELODY MAKER, NOV 30, 1968

PROPHETS, SEERS & SAGES

TRACKMARKS

1 Deboraarobed ★★★★
2 Stacey Grove ★★★★
3 Wind Quartets ★★★★
4 Conesuala ★★★★
5 Trelawny Lawn ★★★
6 Aznageel The Mage ★★★
7 The Friends ★★★
8 Salamanda Palaganda ★★★★
9 Our Wonderful Brownskin Man ★★★
10 Oh Harley (The Saltimbanques) ★★★★
11 Earnest Spell ★★★★
12 The Travelling Tragition ★★★★
13 Juniper Suction ★★★
14 Scenescof Dynasty ★★★

Label: Regal Zonophone
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Trident Studios, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar), Steve Peregrin Took (bongos, vocals, African talking drums, assorted percussion, kazoo, pixiephone, Chinese gong)
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL ALBUM THAT DEFTLY PAINTS BOLAN'S HIPPIE MYSTIC VISION

engineer Malcolm Toft would quickly have to bounce down the tracks on the studio's eight-track recorder to make more space for Bolan's flights of fancy. Often, it's Took's percussion that colours the edges of the songs – gongs, tinkling bells, babbling brooks of bongos. Not too much has changed from the debut – Bolan's songs hint at folk but are rather less 'trad' than that would imply; Took shades the contours of the melodies while Bolan sighs, sweeps, and bleats with that inimitable vibrato of his – but the recording is clearer, Visconti avoiding the blur and murk of the debut.

THERE are also some gorgeous melodies here – the wistful sigh of "Wind Quartets"; the pattering mind-melt of "Conesuala", where the *"quiver mouth chants a crooning moon rune"*; the tendril-like guitar of "Eastern Spell", which is delightfully plotted before Bolan swoons into a voiceless chant.

The album closes with the handclap-and-voice chant of "Scenescof Dynasty", Bolan at his most effusive – some might say indulged – singing of Scenescof's *"gorgon machine"*, the driver a *"cancer growth cell"* whose *"words were just recorded tapes of Hell"*. It's clumsy, but at least it's ambitious. And while *Prophets, Seers & Sages...* can get a bit gauche or awkward – there's some faintly daft orientalist exoticism going on at various points, and the rather questionable "Our Wonderful Brownskin Man" – these speak to the disarming unknowing of the album's times, chiming in with a mystical universalism that hasn't really got its head around Eurocentrism and difference.

If the debut Tyrannosaurus Rex album was a success, after its own fashion (it reached the Top 20 in the UK) *Prophets, Seers & Sages...* must have felt like a step backwards for a competitive, ambitious artist like Bolan as it failed to make the charts at all. Listening anew, though, you can clearly hear the prodigious energy for songs and ideas pouring out of Bolan's head, someone swimming deep in enthusiasm for their art, all the while with one eye cocked toward the machinery of the pop factory.

It's a beautiful album that deftly paints Bolan's hippie mystic vision, and as it passes by your ears, you'll catch a glimpse both of the British underground's times and of the minimalist visionary Bolan was due to become.

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

UNICORN

RELEASED MAY 16, 1969

Just prior to their electric evolution, Marc – now a successful author – goes all out for mysticism and sets a course for faerie lands.

BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

SOMETIME in 1968, Marc Bolan discovered Watkins bookshop. Established at the end of the 19th century and located in Cecil Court, a pedestrianised alleyway of shops at the southern end of London's Charing Cross Road, Watkins was – and still is – Britain's pre-eminent source of arcane literature about mysticism, occultism and oriental religions.

Partly inspired by *The Lord Of The Rings*, there was at the time a cultish hippie fascination with witches, wizards, ley lines, zodiacs, Druids, UFOs and lost continents inhabited by mythological gods, and Bolan was just one of many long-haired types to be found lurking among the shop's dusty book stacks.

Jimmy Page was a regular customer, and it was here that Donovan bought the book that prompted him to write "Atlantis". It was also here that Bolan found much of the inspiration for the lyrics for Tyrannosaurus Rex's third album.

These songs offered a pick'n'mix pilgrimage into occult lore, with a few additional fantastical inventions from Bolan's own fertile imagination. Here be unicorns, gods, giants, mages, maenads, silver satyrs, angels, titans, horned dogs, bulls of gold, cloud lords and the Starguard Rhina with *"his lips soiled with gold"* on the misty coast of Albany. Not to mention the odd dragon's tooth or quest for the mystical isle of Avalon.

A selection of Bolan's reading at the time – a book on the Cottingley fairies, the mystical verse of William Blake and Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* – is displayed on the back cover of *Unicorn* and similar themes were reflected in Bolan's own volume of poetry, *The Warlock Of Love*, published around the same time and proudly on sale in Watkins' bookshop.

The first two Tyrannosaurus Rex albums contained frequent allusions to the kingdom of faerie, but on *Unicorn* Bolan took his Tolkienesque visions and poetic ambitions to new heights of fancy.

Over the years many have accused him of faking the hippie mystic shtick because he saw it as his route to fame, and only a fool would deny his fevered desire to be a pop star. Yet in his early days at least, Bolan fully subscribed to Shelley's nostrum that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and his desire to be taken seriously as a laureate was palpable.

On key song "She Was Born To Be My Unicorn" you can hear him straining and squeezing every syllable to establish a bridge between Dylan (*"The night-mare's mauve mashed mind sights the visions of the blinds"*) and Tolkien (*"Darkly ghostish host haggard vizier of the moats seeks the sandled shores of Gods"*). The execution may today seem clumsy but it would be cynical to doubt the earnestness of his effort. "The lyrics are beautiful; there's a splash of Tolkien but there's also a lot of philosophy – he wasn't faking that," reckoned Tony Visconti. Visconti also judged *Unicorn* to be "by far the best and most magical Tyrannosaurus Rex album", a view widely shared by hippies of a certain age and disposition – although whether you regard Bolan's songs on *Unicorn* as offering a glimpse into an arcane realm beyond our sensory perceptions or merely a hippified version of Edward Lear's nonsense rhymes will be a matter of taste.

Ultimately it doesn't really matter. From the opening lines of "Chariots Of Silk" (*"The toad road licked my wheels like a sabre/Winds of the marsh lightly blew/ Stone jars stacked with stars on her shoulders/Hunters of pity she slew"*) to the album's fade-out on which Bolan repeatedly sings *"Romany soup, I gotta get some ro-romany soup"* like a magic charm, the poetry lies not in the meaning of his lyrics but in the evocatively romantic sound of his words with their florid use of alliteration and assonance.

Bolan's literary pretensions reach their height (some would say nadir) on his fairy

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"*Unicorn* marks the start of the duo's excursion into electronic backings. Half is traditional Rex. The rest, recorded after a six-month break, is new Rex plus electricity – a coupling full of intriguing possiblities which they promise to take further on the fourth album."
NME, MAY 24, 1969

"The most interesting yet from Rex, who have attempted to broaden their scope without damaging the qualities of Marc Bolan's poetry or wildly altering the duo's sound."
MELODY MAKER, JUNE 7, 1969

TRACKMARKS

1 Chariots Of Silk ★★★★
2 Pon A Hill ★★
3 The Seal Of Seasons ★★★
4 The Throat Of Winter ★★★
5 Cat Black (The Wizard's Hat) ★★★★
6 Stones For Avalon ★★
7 She Was Born To Be My Unicorn ★★★★
8 Like A White Star, Tangled And Far, Tulip That's What You Are ★★★
9 Warlord Of The Royal Crocodiles ★★★★
10 Evenings Of Damask ★★★
11 The Sea Beasts ★★★
12 Iscariot ★★★
13 Nijinsky Hind ★★★
14 The Pilgrim's Tale ★★★
15 The Misty Coast Of Albany ★★
16 Romany Soup ★★

Label: Regal Zonophone
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Trident Studios, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan (acoustic gtr, vocals, harmonium, organ, phonofiddle), Steve Peregrin Took (drums, bongos, bk vocals), Tony Visconti (piano), John Peel (narration)
Highest chart position: UK 12; US –

story about Lionel Lark and Mole. Fusing elements derived from *The Wind In The Willows* and *Alice Through The Looking Glass* and narrated on the album by John Peel in a characteristically flat monotone, it is charmingly whimsical for anyone subscribing to the era's suspension of disbelief.

Musically we're in the realm of elfin freak-folk, pungent aromas of incense and patchouli everywhere, but the strum-and-bongos vibe is marginally less lo-fi than on the first two albums, particularly on "Cat Black (The Wizard's Hat)", with its dreamy, almost doo-wop chorus and Visconti's lambent piano chords.

With Bolan's trademark stray-cat vibrato wail augmented by some gorgeous harmonising from Took on the likes of "Evenings Of Damask" and "Nijinsky Hind", the melodies are often dizzying too, and within the acoustic freakery lurk some vibrant pop hooks. The three-chord strumming of "Warlord Of The Royal Crocodiles" owes as much to Buddy Holly as to the Incredible String Band, and it's not too hard to imagine the simple, toe-tapping melody of "She Was Born To Be My Unicorn" recast with an electric glam-rock arrangement.

BOLAN TOOK HIS TOLKIENESQUE VISIONS AND POETIC AMBITIONS TO NEW HEIGHTS OF FANCY

In some ways, *Unicorn* was pivotal: the band's last LP of the decade, and the last to feature Took. An habitué of Ladbroke Grove, he was an archetypal fabulous furry freak brother, whose stoner persona put him at odds with the hyperactive, ambitious, Bolan.

When Took was busted for possession, spending several weeks on remand, Bolan snapped. The final straw came with Took's demands that the duo should record his compositions. Listening to the songs he took with him and recorded with the Deviants' drummer Twink on 1970's *Think Pink*, Bolan arguably made the right call in sacking him.

The other transition underway in 1969 is illustrated by two contemporary non-album singles, subsequently added to the 2004 expanded reissue of *Unicorn*. "Pewter Suitor", released just before the album, is classic acoustic Bolan whimsy. By contrast, "King Of The Rumbling Spires", recorded immediately after the album sessions, was the first track to feature prominent electric guitar.

It signposted the way to glam rock heaven and showed us – as Bolan prophesised in the final line of his now out-of-print and much sought-after book of verse – "Tyrannosaurus Rex, reborn and bopping".

Change is afoot in Tyrannosaurus Rex. Electric guitars and drums are in ("To me it's completely fair to use electricity…"), but Steve Peregrin Took is out. With his eyes opened by the possibilities of America (where he experienced "very heavy acceptance"), **MARC BOLAN** embraces the future. "I think very positively now," he tells **CHRIS WELCH**, "and I know exactly what I want to do."

PETER SANDERS/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"There are no bad vibes between us at all": Tyrannosaurus Rex, Hyde Park, London, spring 1969

Bolan and replacement percussionist Mickey Finn (out of shot) play their seventh gig together at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon, December 27, 1969

MELODY MAKER | MAY 31, 1969

TOADSTOOLVILLE has switched on to electricity! Tyrannosaurus Rex have gone "heavy" and OUT are the rattling pots of yesteryear. IN are toy drums and shhhh, a Stratocaster. Marc Bolan, curly-haired bopping imp of pop, has wrought changes and unleashed progression in his two-imp group.

Marc and Steve Peregrin Took have been criticised for "sounding the same" on their recordings and live performances. Their initial appeal was complete simplicity. Marc sang and used a cheap acoustic guitar, Steve gripped bongos between his knees and rattled.

While maintaining the child-like qualities that endeared them to university and underground audiences from *Perfumed Garden* to unperfumed dance hall, Tyrannosaurus is leaping into pastures new. The group go to America on June 15 for 10 weeks. Perhaps the charge of electricity will give them extra strength for the ordeal ahead.

Marc and his girlfriend June Child entertained me with a feast of eggs and wine at their spacious attic dwelling in west London recently, and chatted while playing the new Rex album *Unicorn*.

"When we go to America we'll be living in a house in California with Aynsley Dunbar and the Floyd. It's cheap and practical," said Marc while June Child went out in pursuit of fresh casks of wine.

But Marc would not agree that he was in any way worried about their first Stateside trip. "We've altered very much from how we used to be. We use a full drum kit now and we have done a completely electric single. It sounds like John's Children." Marc smiled. That was the group he joined for a while during the height of flower power, which produced surprisingly heavy rock like the classic "Go Go Girl".

"On the new album we use bass and a proper drum kit we bought in Hamley's, and I've bought a Stratocaster. It doesn't actually sound that much different, just more funky. We always played pop music anyway, and to me it's completely fair to use electricity. But we won't be loud. We're using two 15-watt amps.

"Going to America doesn't really excite me at all. If we are a success – well, that will be lovely. The American bands I have seen have been so bad. It seems to me that if you are just together in your own scene you can be successful there.

"We've never had anything released there, but I think some imports have sold about 2,000. We can only go on and play and show them we believe in what we're doing."

Their next single is to be "King Of The Rumbling Spires". Is it a rocker?

"Yes, it sounds a bit like The Who, I suppose. It'll be released in August."

Their recorded output is quite enormous for such a tiny combo. *Unicorn* is their third album and, says Marc, "We've already done our next one. For us, eight hours is a long session.

"We've always had complete freedom to do what we like. I have a complete say in everything, and Tony Visconti, our producer, is such a lovely cat.

"As a kid I always wanted to record, and it took me so long to get into records, I don't want to stop now. It's silly when you see groups in studios sitting around all day just dirtying up the place. There's no need to spend 20 hours getting a bass sound. Record it flat and 'live', then spend the time on reducing."

As part of their "new look", Tyrannosaurus have also added a 12-quid Woolworth's organ to their lineup, which must intrigue groups up to their eyes in hire purchase.

CHRIS WELCH

RAY STEVENSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

NME | JULY 26, 1969

TAKE away such bourgeois luxuries as the shiny new stereo, the TV lurking self-consciously in one corner and the delicious strawberry gateau thoughtfully provided by girlfriend June and the cliché scene of the angry-young-man haranguing the world from his one-roomed garret becomes complete.

It would be out of character for Marc Bolan, the energetic impish bundle behind Tyrannosaurus Rex, to harangue. Sense is what he talks and his anger manifests itself in vexation rather than violence. "You are one of the few journalists who actually like our music," said Marc, perching cross-legged on the one piece of furniture in the room – the bed. "People have built up this big intellectual barrier against Tyrannosaurus Rex. It's just pop music as far as I am concerned. Not pop music taking it as far as Dave Dee, but all the same it's not something totally incomprehensible."

It was the friendly June who drove me out to the couple's home in Ladbroke Grove at the top of one

of those tottering old houses long since removed from a lick of paint. Burning joss sticks and three vases of daffodils scented the air and the tiny room itself resembled a fairy grotto full of curious knick-knacks, the walls covered in drawings and paintings cut from colour magazines – a Bosch, a Picasso, a Dalí. The floorboards were bare and furniture at a minimum.

Radio 1 and television and the lack of time accorded by either to the underground are the targets for Marc's anger. "Producers and disc jockeys just don't want to know us," said Marc, striking a fork into his gateau as Flute, his cat, snakes around his legs.

"'One Inch Rock' didn't get played a lot but at least they played it. The last single hardly got any radio plays at all. That's why we haven't released a single for about six months – it seems to be a waste of time. People don't even listen."

"'Pewter Suitor' was taken round to DJs and producers, and when they heard it was the new Tyrannosaurus Rex single everyone just shrugged their shoulders and said we know what that's going to sound like. They didn't even want to hear it.

"But we're trying once more with a single. I get so excited about singles because I can write one so quickly and get it out in three weeks, and if then it is not going to be played..." He shrugged.

"To record in a studio is for me the ultimate in communication because you can spend a long time getting everything just right. Then you are robbed of getting it over to people.

"But we have our audience. The LPs sell incredibly well and we get full concert halls. You can only continue and hope that it becomes acceptable. It is only actually not being on television and getting in the papers that is the drag."

FOR acceptance Marc is looking to America, which the Rex visit this month for the first time. A big build-up is being planned for them and Marc feels that if they do make it there everyone in England will turn around and say: "Well I always knew they'd be big."

"I am so excited at going to America," he says. "The kids here are a gas but the media is just saying nothing. If America wasn't there or there weren't good singles around like 'Pinball Wizard' then I wouldn't make records. I would just play at home."

And then back to his earlier theme: "It is such a teaser for Radio 1 to give us *Top Gear* and to then virtually take it off, because what they've done amounts to that. We have got so near to having complete satisfaction. It was like the radio really wanted to help and there was a monster audience there wanting to listen.

"Most underground groups are just Top 10 groups without the exposure," added Marc in a quote which just about sums up the whole situation. Those words should be carved in huge stone letters and erected in the offices of every DJ and producer in the country.

Radio 1 aside, life isn't too bad for Marc and Steve. Mr Bolan's first book of poetry, *The Warlock Of Love*, was recently published and is selling well, their new single "King Of The Rumbling Spires" is released this week and the duo has just finished a successful concert tour.

The third Rex LP, *Unicorn* is selling well and represents a change in musical policy. The bongos are gradually being edged out to be replaced by cello, bass and organ, the latter used on the album being a £12 model Marc bought in Woolworth's and surprised himself by discovering he could play it. The fourth album, Marc promises, will take the transformation to electric backings even further.

There has been a change in Marc's singing, too. "It really bugged me because people said they couldn't hear the words," said Marc. The climax came when some copies of *Prophets, Seers And Sages* went out minus the word sheets. "I tried to rethink my whole way of singing. You see I use my voice as a physical release – like Clapton uses a guitar. But I had to discipline myself into making the words heard."

Marc walked down to the Underground with me (there must be something symbolic there) and left me with this parting quote: "It is not so much for us, because we've already had the exposure through *Top Gear*, but what about all the other new groups that will never get the chance... It's sad. It really is." *NICK LOGAN*

"WE ALWAYS GET GOOD REVIEWS, BUT JOHN PEEL IS THE ONLY DJ WHO WILL PLAY US HERE"
MARC BOLAN

MELODY MAKER | OCTOBER 11, 1969

IS Tyrannosaurus Rex extinct? Never in a million years! Steve Peregrin Took, the drummer who took his name from the stories of Professor Tolkien, has split. But Marc Bolan, the Bopping Imp, plans to keep bopping.

The two-man group went their separate ways on returning from their first tour of America. Last week Marc, the guitarist/song writer who created the concept of a simple "acoustic and bongos" medium for expressing his songs, advertised in the *MM* for "a gentle young guy who can play percussion".

What caused the Bolan-Took breakup, and what lies ahead for T.Rex? Marc materialised before me in a skinny pullover and bright yellow crushed velvet trousers, beaming and full of enthusiasm.

"It was my birthday yesterday," he revealed, as we sampled the ale supplied by Marc's garrulous, bearded Scots publicist. "I was 22 – can you believe that? And I can remember when I was nine. It doesn't seem long ago."

What happened 'twixt Steve and Marc?

"We're not playing together any more. There are no bad vibes between us at all. It sounds unbelievable I know, but it's really down to each of us wanting to do our own thing. I don't know what he wants to do. I think he wants to get into a heavier group thing with Twink from The Pretty Things. We decided to split two days before we left for America, which made everybody very uptight. But really it's very cool. The concept of T.Rex was mine and I knew that one day Steve would grow and want to do something on his own.

"I think very positively now and I know exactly what I want to do. There won't be a new direction – it will be a continued growth. I have one or two people in mind and I have put an ad in the *MM*. It will still be a duo. Tyrannosaurus Rex is still a very young thing and although it has gone electric, it will still be much softer and more harmonious than most groups.

"America was a gas. The gigs were phenomenally good, but it's a strange country. There are always shades of violence everywhere. It's amazing when you think half of the American population is under 25. That's about 130 million young people, and of course they are in conflict with the older generation.

"England seems so lovely and small and medieval after America. I couldn't wait to get back. But the record company did a good promotion job on us in the States. FM radio is tremendous. You get the equivalent of four *Top Gear* programmes 24 hours a day, and you get the jazz, soul or straight music shows. They played our album *Unicorn* three times in a row! It makes fighting for your one Radio 1 Club spot a bit heavy and a bit sad."

Did Marc run into hard times in the States with the street idiot problem?

"You don't go out. Going out into the street is a thing you just don't do. You stay in the motel all day and go to the gig in the evening. Of course people are rude to you, but you get used to it after the first two days. The best way to work it in the States is to find nice people to stay with."

What was the reaction to their act?

"Very heavy acceptance. We didn't do any of our new things. It was like starting all over again. But we were very fortunate, and went down well, thank God. We're going back in January and we'll have a new album and single out there.

"The album will be released simultaneously here, but forget England for singles. People keep telling me to make singles and we always get good reviews. But John Peel is the only DJ who will play us here, and Alan Freeman. We shall be doing a concert tour of England before going back to America, probably with John. And I'd like to do the first of the free concerts in the park next year.

"America has changed my head a lot. I want to make contact with a lot more people. It's like having blinkers ripped from your eyes. I'm much freer in my attitude towards music."

Marc admitted he even liked a little jazz. "It's like when I went out to buy 'Blue Suede Shoes' by Elvis Presley when I was 12. They sold me Carl Perkins by mistake, and I discovered he had written the song and his version was much better. Blinkers were being ripped off!"

Marc has written a lot more material. "About 20 new songs, with four possible singles. But I'm not hung up on singles. I never compromise. I've got complete artistic control, and I'm going to carry on doing what I want. And I want to turn people on to my music. I'm a pop singer musically. Lyrically, I'm a poet." *CHRIS WELCH*

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

A BEARD OF STARS

RELEASED | MARCH 13, 1970

With a groovy new sidekick, Bolan embraces pop on an acoustic practice run for glam. BY JOHN LEWIS

A BEARD Of Stars is the precise tipping point between the dippy, hippie, acoustic psych-folk duo Tyrannosaurus Rex and the glam rock behemoth that was T.Rex. One key element is the change in personnel, with Steve Peregrin Took leaving to join fellow drug-addled anarchists The Pink Fairies.

His pretty-boy replacement Mickey Finn was, on paper, a lesser musician. Took was a fully fledged multi-instrumentalist who played cello, guitar and bass. He seemed more like an orchestral percussionist than a rock star, and someone who would frequently veto Bolan's decisions. Finn was a much more pliable figure, someone willing to bend to Bolan's dictatorial requirements. But crucially, Finn was all about the groove: Tyrannosaurus Rex was now free from Took's meandering rhythm tracks, which is exactly what Bolan needed at this point.

Another crucial change is that the band have finally plugged in. Following May 1969's *Unicorn*, Tyrannosaurus Rex hit the lower reaches of the UK chart in August with their fourth standalone non-album single "King Of The Rumbling Spires" (Took's last appearance with the band). It saw the band beef up their sound using electric bass, drums and electric guitar for the first time, with Steve Took pounding on floor toms, Tony Visconti playing bass guitar and Bolan switching to a heavily distorted lead guitar.

A Beard Of Stars never rocks out quite as much as that single, but an electric charge hovers over the entire album. Every single track is overdubbed with electric guitar – switching between bluesy obligatos, funky solos or the gentle throb of a wah-wah pedal – while the acoustic guitar recedes to the back of the mix.

All these songs are in a major key – something that's true of nearly all Bolan songs – but where Tyrannosaurus Rex's first three albums seem distrustful of mass appeal, *A Beard Of Stars* sees Bolan embrace his latent pop sensibility. Until now, for the sake of his image and credibility, he had to look to the world like he was simply too fine and too pure to be corrupted by the prospect of commercial success. On a song like "Fist Heart Mighty Dawn Dart" though, it seems that Bolan can't wait to race through the cryptic verse ("*Sun liege by your star trees/Could you please heart cleanse our shores*") and get to the catchiest pop hook he's put on an album yet. Don't shores us, get to the chorus.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"With the presence of new bongo and percussion man Mickey Finn and a Clapton influence on Marc's electric guitar wailing, the two-man group achieve a whole new variety of effects while retaining their jolly, poetic appeal."
CHRIS WELCH, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 28, 1970

"All in all, a nice, not too demanding album with the guitar and other electric embellishments a bonus to what we know the duo is already capable of."
NICK LOGAN, NME, MARCH 21, 1970

It means that *A Beard Of Stars* doesn't really sound like an organic, stand-alone acoustic Tyrannosaurus Rex album, more an acoustic version of T.Rex – a dry run for glam rock. Indeed, the instrumental title track sounds like a dress rehearsal for "Teenage Dream"; the whimsical, drumless "Woodland Bop" sounds like an acoustic, double-speed, 1:39 version of "Cosmic Dancer". Even on the album's most freak-friendly track, "Organ Blues" – where Bolan plays a harmonium-style drone on an electric organ and Finn plays a wobbly tabla figure – the melody sounds like a demo version of "Hot Love".

Another key part of this pop transition was to cultivate Bolan's image as the romantic lead. If the Tolkienesque mysticism of the earlier albums was there to provide a fantasy world in which adolescent boys and asexual hippies could escape from earthly, lustful desires, here the same mysticism has a very physical resonance. It is a mysticism in service of libido. "By The Light Of The Magical Moon", for all its talk of princesses, celestial bodies and elders, is a straight-up love song about wanting to "*dance with my baby*". Tellingly, the song is superimposed with an eerily prophetic recording of an audience of screaming girls, something that Bolan and Finn would be experiencing for real in a few months' time when "T.Rextasy" really

A BEARD OF STARS

TRACKMARKS

1. Prelude ★★
2. A Day Laye ★★★
3. Woodland Bop ★★★
4. Fist Heart Mighty Dawn Dart ★★★★
5. Pavilions Of Sun ★★★
6. Organ Blues ★★★
7. By The Light Of A Magical Moon ★★★★
8. Wind Cheetah ★★★
9. A Beard Of Stars ★★
10. Great Horse ★★
11. Dragon's Ear ★★★
12. Lofty Skies ★★★
13. Dove ★★★★
14. Elemental Child ★★★

Label: Regal Zonophone
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Trident Studios, London, April-November 1969
Personnel: Marc Bolan (lead vocals, acoustic and electric guitars, organ, bass), Mickey Finn (backing vocals, Moroccan clay drums, tabla, finger cymbals, bass guitar)
Highest chart position: UK 21; US –

took off (pop psychologists might call this technique "visualisation").

EVEN ON THE MOST FREAK-FRIENDLY TRACK, THE MELODY SOUNDS LIKE A DEMO VERSION OF "HOT LOVE"

ON the folksy flamenco "Dragon's Ear", the references to "*druid's spears*", "*dworns*" and "*fangs of wrath*" all add a mystical dignity to a courtly love song ("*I love you my love/ Please taketh this heart which I bear*"). The aforementioned "Woodland Bop" gives the impression that it's some pastoral tale, set "*in the evening dusk dunes*", but it's a thinly veiled love letter to a woman who emerges "*in the moon-white*". "Lofty Skies", powered by a pulsating wah-wah guitar and a Steve Reich organ, contains another straight-up love lyric ("*We were pinned by the might of the warrior night/We kissed and cried*"). "Dove" is a lovely, limpid song of utter infatuation, set to dreamy chord changes and a florid bassline. "*All my fears are water clear when I'm not with you/All I hear is wicked dear when I'm not with you*", Bolan warbles.

He still hasn't quite jettisoned his Tolkien obsession. Dreamy ballad "A Daye Laye" has a spiritual undertow: "*Every dawn of our lives a heart is forged*", he sings, "*Born with blessed life dust stored beneath its soul*".

It's like one of Simon & Garfunkel's secular hymns taken into cosmic hippie territory. "Pavilions Of Sun" is both wonderful and utterly ridiculous (on the latter note its courtly language and imagery are clearly the basis for Flight Of The Conchords' hippie parody "Prince Of Parties"). "Wind Cheetah" is like a piece of ambient heavy metal, based around organ drones and fuzz bass, with some of Bolan's most absurd lyrics: "*Myrrh-coated rider/Guider husband to matron, the king*".

The album closes with the all-electric "Elemental Child": there are no drums but Bolan is finally able to plug in and boogie on an electric guitar. Again, the mystical lyrics are less an adolescent denial of the physical, but a courtly expression of lust. "*Torch girl of the marshes*", coos Bolan, "*Her kiss is a whip of the moon*". Around the two-minute mark, they start an extended one-chord jam that extends the song to 5:33 minutes, making it the longest song in the Bolan canon. It serves as one last bone being thrown out to the hippies and prog rock fans. From now on, Bolan's electric odyssey would be aiming for a very different market. ✪

"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED OUR MUSIC TO ROCK MORE, TO BE HEAVIER"

A year of increasing impact for Marc Bolan and his newly abbreviated T.Rex. From *Beard Of Stars* to *T.Rex* via the breakthrough single "Ride A White Swan", the band stand apart from the "underground" ("Some of those groups in two or three years time will be dustmen…") and ready to take on the world with their "cosmic rock". "I don't really think that T.Rex has even started yet," he quite reasonably decides.

Tyrannosaurus Rex: the first promo shots of the new lineup, near Notting Hill Gate, west London, mid-October 1969

PETE SANDERS/GETTY IMAGES

MELODY MAKER | MARCH 14, 1970

TYRANNOSAURUS REX has taken rather a pasting recently. Trevor Brice of Vanity Fare in *Blind Date* said of their new album: "I think it's horrible. It's like an old-age pensioner singing."

On the wireless too, uncomplimentary remarks have been noted. But are Marc Bolan and Mickey Finn prostrate with gloom and humiliation? Never in a million years BC.

Marc cheerfully denies that he is hurt by this kind of criticism. He lives with wife June Child in a cosy flat in Notting Hill Gate, and the couple kindly prepared an excellent feast of non-fattening vegetables, cheese and wine for me this week while we discussed the problem.

"I'm not hurt at all," said Marc beaming through a mass of black, curly hair while bopping slightly to a Johnny Burnette album, "I know where Trevor Brice is at and I wouldn't want to hear 'Hitchin' A Ride' either.

"Tommy Vance played four tracks off our new album last week and he became totally horrific and paranoic. He said he couldn't understand any of the lyrics. It seems to be alien music to them. It's a bit of a mystery to me, because I can understand them. Why can't they understand me?

"Tommy Vance slated the album terribly then played a Honeybus record. But I liked the Honeybus as well, so we can agree on that.

"The album has sold about 6,000 in a few days and I think *A Beard Of Stars* is the best one we have ever done. Yes, I suppose there is a lot more electric guitar.

"At the time I thought *Unicorn* was incredibly electric, but now it sounds like an acoustic album. Some of the sounds on *Beard* are so different, it's like starting again – like being three LPs ahead. I've been staying down at Eric Clapton's home quite a bit recently and you can't be around Eric and not be influenced."

While Marc is a long way from sounding like a one-man Cream, he is happy to experiment within the framework of his technique. The point about T.Rex is that one has to approach their work with a smile.

Not a heavy rock group, or a folk group or even an Underground band, they are Marc and Mick having a little fun and adding a delicate morsel to the main musical diet.

In his poetry, Marc takes pleasure in words for their own sake and even if they don't necessarily make the kind of "sense" that dullards want to hear, they are all printed on a separate sheet with each album, and Bolan has taken pains to ensure better diction this time.

"Can YOU hear the words?" he asked anxiously. "Sure," I mumbled through a mouthful of Brussels sprouts.

Marc changed the album backgrounding the conversation to Frankie Lymon singing *All-Time Oldies*.

"I've always been a fan of early rock'n'roll – it's really good music. The first Elvis records were really incredible. I'm not into Merrill Moore, or Charlie Rich, but Lonnie Mack is great.

"A lot of today's kids only know about underground groups. They think of us and Beefheart and Family, but it all started with people like Frankie Lymon. All the Beach Boys and Beatles harmonies were based on these early records. It's nice to get back to the originals.

"The Beatles just use modern techniques. Lennon is a rocker – totally. It would have been too much if they could get today's drum and bass sound on the old records.

"My first experience of rock came when I heard 'Ballad Of Davey Crockett' by Bill Hayes. My dad went out to buy me a record and got one by Bill Haley. I was so disappointed – until I heard the record. Then I threw Bill Hayes out of the window and rocked. I've been rockin' ever since. I got turned on to Carl Perkins when the shop flogged me his version of 'Blue Suede Shoes' because they had sold out of Elvis Presley. I was really brought down. Then I played the record – and rocked again!

"Marty Wilde influenced me a lot. He has a really great voice. And there were the others – Billy Fury, Vince Taylor, Vince Eager and Cliff Richard. Cliff used to be incredible. When I was working behind the bar at the 2i's they kicked Cliff Richard out and said he would never make it. Those *Expresso Bongo* days were great – just like the hippie days of 1967."

But while Marc was in nostalgic mood, he also had plenty of plans for the year ahead.

"We are doing a Festival Hall concert soon and we go to the States in May for five weeks. I want to play there very much because it is such a huge market. The trouble is the American middle-class is exactly like our middle-class and they respond in exactly the same way, except they are magnified by a million times and they are less inhibited in punching you on the nose. England is a very lovely, and ancient isle in comparison.

"Things are going very nicely for us, really. We are just a contemporary rock group. We are not the Incredible String Band or a folk group.

"We were thinking of going on at the Festival Hall with 400 watts each and freak 'em all out! All the kids will come to see freaky Bolan quietly doing his thing – then NEAGH!"

If Bolan and Finn try the Wall Of Sound technique, it will certainly shock those who plague Marc with: "How does it feel to be a little elf?"

CHRIS WELCH

"I AM A HARD PERSON TO WORK WITH. I AM ECCENTRIC AS A PERSONALITY. I AM TEMPERAMENTAL"
MARC BOLAN

Strattinghisstuff, Copenhagen, 1970

JORGEN ANGEL/GETY IMAGES

NME | NOVEMBER 21, 1970

MARC BOLAN talks a good deal about cosmic energy and cosmic laws. The latter decrees that your life is mapped out at birth and what will be will be, but only when the time is right. And the time, says Marc, is obviously now right for T.Rex in the singles charts, although he admits that more earthly principles – like Fly, their new label, spending a good bit of money on promotion – also had a hand in the success of "Ride A White Swan".

Cosmic or capitalist, anything that projects the intelligent and engaging Mr Bolan more sharply into focus is to be welcomed.

"We're really working hard every night," he told me at his Notting Hill home on Friday, breaking off from fixing morning tea to display a finger blunted and scarred as a result of its owner's exuberant attacks on the guitar strings.

As those who participated in the Rex's recent concert tour will be aware, Marc is these days putting in a good deal of time in the electric idiom and it isn't only the shortened name that has changed since Bolan's brainchild first burst upon us some three years ago as the doyens of the then minuscule Underground.

From that glittering launching, and Marc is the first to admit it, the duo has tended to settle in a comfortable position as middle-of-the-table progressive league attraction without carrying off the major honours many thought they were capable of. On the other hand, the Bolan energy itself has shown no signs of diminishing and "...White Swan" seems to mark an upsurge in their fortunes.

"The success of '...White Swan' is a gas," opened the dungareed Mr Bolan, "because I want people to hear my music. We could be very comfortable just being an Underground act... quite well established, doing concert tours, selling a fair

Copenhagen, Denmark – August 1970

amount of each album... but it is not really on.

"You get to the stage where you have had four/five albums and you begin to think you are not reaching people. I know for a fact that '...White Swan' is getting to people who have never been interested before and maybe some of them will buy the next album.

"I don't really think that T.Rex has even started yet... we haven't yet reached a zenith musically, but I certainly don't think we are declining which, on your fifth record, is very important. I am very aware that we are not declining."

The duo's use of added instrumentation and Marc's electric sorties have been part of their progress. He's not, though, quite the beginner many think he is, having learnt a guitar grounding with John's Children. Eric Clapton has been of help but, to Marc, *the* guitarist was Hendrix, for the emotion of the man that came through the music.

Contrary to some reports, however, T.Rex are not giving up on acoustic, although as Marc points out they never set themselves up in the first place as a folk duo.

The first products of T.Rex were "raw songs" that came mainly out of a feeling of rebellion on Marc's part against the orchestrations producers of the time were forcing on the artists. From that unpolished state Marc feels his songs have developed until they have reached a stage where they are ready for the nuances of electricity and orchestrations. "All we are doing," he explains, "is strengthening the songs... if they have any strength at all. I do write quite strong melodies actually but, treated acoustically, the melody isn't so recognisable. 'Ride A White Swan' is a melodic song and it can be picked up because it has the guitar.

"I have to run in to what people want and work around it. I know what people want and I need the media. Otherwise it is like writing songs and never putting them out. I am pleased to be on Radio 1 and *Top Of The Pops* because they are all we have. The next album is just a collection of songs done for the first time as I really heard them. There is orchestra on about four or five tracks. I have heard orchestration before but have never used it."

Even if past lack of success has caused periods of disenchantment with that particular medium, Marc has always held the view that singles are vital and important, and he is pleased to see what he feels is a current resurgence of interest in the 45.

"Everyone likes singles," says Marc, "because they are quick to record and easy to make. An album takes months and it can be a long time between releases."

The next single is in fact already being planned. "It will be an energy record," according to Marc, "because that is what a single should be. All we are going to do is to go into the studio and record the emotion and excitement that should go into a single. What I am concerned with," he smiled, "is cooling down from the far heavens the energy that should be put into a song.

"We want to give value on singles too, so there will be a poster with it, and a 10-minute B side with five short tracks."

The album after next is planned too, and it will, reveals Marc, be a science fiction story called *The Children Of Rarn*, which they will also be performing in concert in the near future, working with a string quartet. All things considered, the next step for T.Rex would appear to be expansion. But Marc, while accepting the logic of it, is adamant that it won't happen.

Their producer, Tony Visconti, had played bass for them the previous night at Oxford and Marc revealed that he was looking for a permanent bassist to play on two or three numbers in a set "so that I can relax a bit on guitar". But that, where expansion is concerned, is as far as he wants to go.

"What I hear now in my head is larger than we can do on stage," he admits, "because you just cannot do with two people what you can with four, but that doesn't mean we need any more. We don't need bass on all numbers and I still do acoustic numbers totally on my own.

"Basically, too, I am a hard person to work with. I am eccentric as a personality. I am very temperamental. The reason John's Children didn't work was because I couldn't cope with four people. I have no time for tensions in groups."

NICK LOGAN

MELODY MAKER | NOVEMBER 28, 1970

Melody Maker
DYLAN DIGS ELTON!
Elvin—Ginger hitch

AQUA-BLUE walls, and magic, hot coffee in shining mugs, gentle talk and good music, the smell of a sweaty foot after a long tramp (that's just part of the magic of being human).

Marc Bolan – against belief not a pixie or elf, but a colourful dreamer – talks of the Children of Rarn, the Peacelings and horrible, fat, greasy Dworns.

He also talks of how incredibly sick he got of T.Rex continually being moderately successful – and nothing more. Shows frustrated disbelief at how people like Tony Blackburn can exist.

"They are not the people who go 'wow' about music, we are. You as a writer, me as a musician. We know about it, they don't. It's absurd. T.Rex have got to get in there and we are. Now we have got to hype these people so we can get money and standing to do our next thing. I never really looked upon commercialism as being important, but when one playing of our single '...White Swan' on Radio One Club sent 2,000 people out to buy it in London, well it speaks for itself," Marc told me.

As we sat listening to an acetate of the next T.Rex album, Marc told me of how this year was really going to be the making or breaking point for the two. "If nothing had happened this year, then I had plans to grind things until it got slower and slower. But at last it is working. The single is

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

selling, the tour that we ourselves organised has been tremendously successful."

A little hamster sniffed the tufts on the carpet to the beautiful strains of "The Children Of Rarn", a Bolan science-fiction dream. "I write horror stories as well," says Marc. I look towards his bookshelf and see *Greek Myths*, *Tales Of Horror And The Supernatural* and a thick William Blake.

The album lapses into electric noise, hard rock. Marc's heritage is rock, and it is rock that he loves and wants to play. "I never really listened to anyone who tried to thrust a policy thing at us, and think we just kept on playing what we wanted to. I always wanted our music to rock more, to be heavier. I wish this album were heavier now. I find I am enjoying myself channelling musical energy into the electric side. We are very energy packed now, not that I feel T.Rex have ever been stagnant, although there was a period when the musical transition of the group was hard.

"This was mainly due to outward pressure, like people didn't want us to change. There were many hassles always, people phoning up, and agents and things. I just could not cope with that. I couldn't write anything when I was being hassled. If there was any lack of progression in us during that period, then it was the hassles that caused it."

The album progresses to "Diamond Meadows" and there is strong use of a string quartet. "To me strings are magical, they are old, and the wood has years and years of history. They are romantic. If we had put this track on our second album, people would have freaked out and wondered what the hell we were doing. But when I wrote this song, I could hear those strings, so they were put in.

"One thing I have realised about this album is that the lyrics are very short. In fact when I listened to the album at first I thought, God there are no lyrics. But of course there are – these are people's words, like love songs. I mean I can change my outlook on things, I can write 55 pages of erotic symbolism, and people expect me to do that all the time. But that's a fallacy, as much as us being an acoustic, quiet duo is a fallacy.

"Now my main intention is to get more into the sound thing. I want to get into guitar a lot more – electric guitar, and rock. I've always been into guitar and rock."

Now let's start talking about magic, and *The Children Of Rarn*. It – the story – will be featured fully on a planned double album. It tells of various fashions of people living on a prehistoric earth. But they are tremendously advanced human beings. The Peacelings are 7ft tall shiny creatures, and then we have the Dworns, soulless bestial swinefolk, who thug around at 200 mph on prehistoric motor-bikes. The tale is simple, and will be performed live with strings.

"AT OUR GIGS IT REALLY IS LIKE THE OLD ROCK DAYS; PEOPLE RUSHING THE STAGE"

MARC BOLAN

Books and posters will accompany it. People will be invited to take part in Bolan fantasy.

"People need fantasy, it's good for the mind," say Marc. "To counteract this, the rest of the LP will be funky, and rocky." *ROY HOLLINGWORTH*

NME | DECEMBER 19, 1970

"THE Last of the Great Underground Groups" is how their publicist fondly describes them... as if T.Rex were some peculiar species of the pop animal dustily discovered after an age of public neglect. Certainly they were one of the first of the Underground breed, at a time when to be so described was to be ridiculed and dismissed by the pop mainstream as a transitory fad.

Yet Marc Bolan doesn't exactly give the impression of a man who's prospered out of the public's new-found attention. Since I've been interviewing T.Rex he's managed to move from a cramped attic bed-sitting room in a rambling Notting Hill block to a cramped two rooms next floor down in the same building, which is no doubt enough to constitutes a sell-out in some minds.

Admittedly he was due to move in four days' time to a slightly larger pad in Little Venice, but when I visited Notting Hill last week (before the electricity go slow) our Top 10 Star was sitting in the half light, his wife, June, having gone out to buy candles. The Bolans had forgotten to pay their bill, it seems, and couldn't get their power restored until the evening.

Marc has much to warm his heart, however, with Fly, their record company, claiming heavy advance orders for the new T.Rex album, and with the addition of Steve Currie's bass and a new stereo sound system increasing the electricity, in more ways than one, of their live performances.

"The audiences are a lot younger now," says Bolan, "They come along with the kind of excitement that in the past has been associated with Led Zeppelin and that kind of stuff, and attendances have been well over capacity. That was my main fear, that some kids might stay away because of the single."

Marc had intended to follow the new album with the science fiction story *The Children Of Rarn*, trailered on the current LP, but has now postponed that project in favour of another rock album... "to cement the direction we are now going in.

"I haven't been in a studio for six months but I've got this sound in my head that is definitely unlike anything else we have put out. It really is cosmic rock. There'll certainly be some live tracks on it, too, perhaps 'Elemental Child' as we do it now.

"I'd like to catch on the record the essence of the audiences we are getting so that people will know what is happening. People who have come along to gigs really cannot believe it. It really is like the old rock days; people rushing the stage."

Since the times when the name Tyrannosaurus Rex on a record signalled its instant dismissal to disc jockeys' rejection piles, the duo has progressed in no small measure. In the afternoon's mounting gloom, we talked about how Marc saw the initial aims and ideals of the Underground and how much he thought they had been realised, if at all.

"In our case initially," started Marc, "I was trying to get away from the pop syndrome and, for me, the Underground at the beginning meant similar-minded people with similar thoughts.

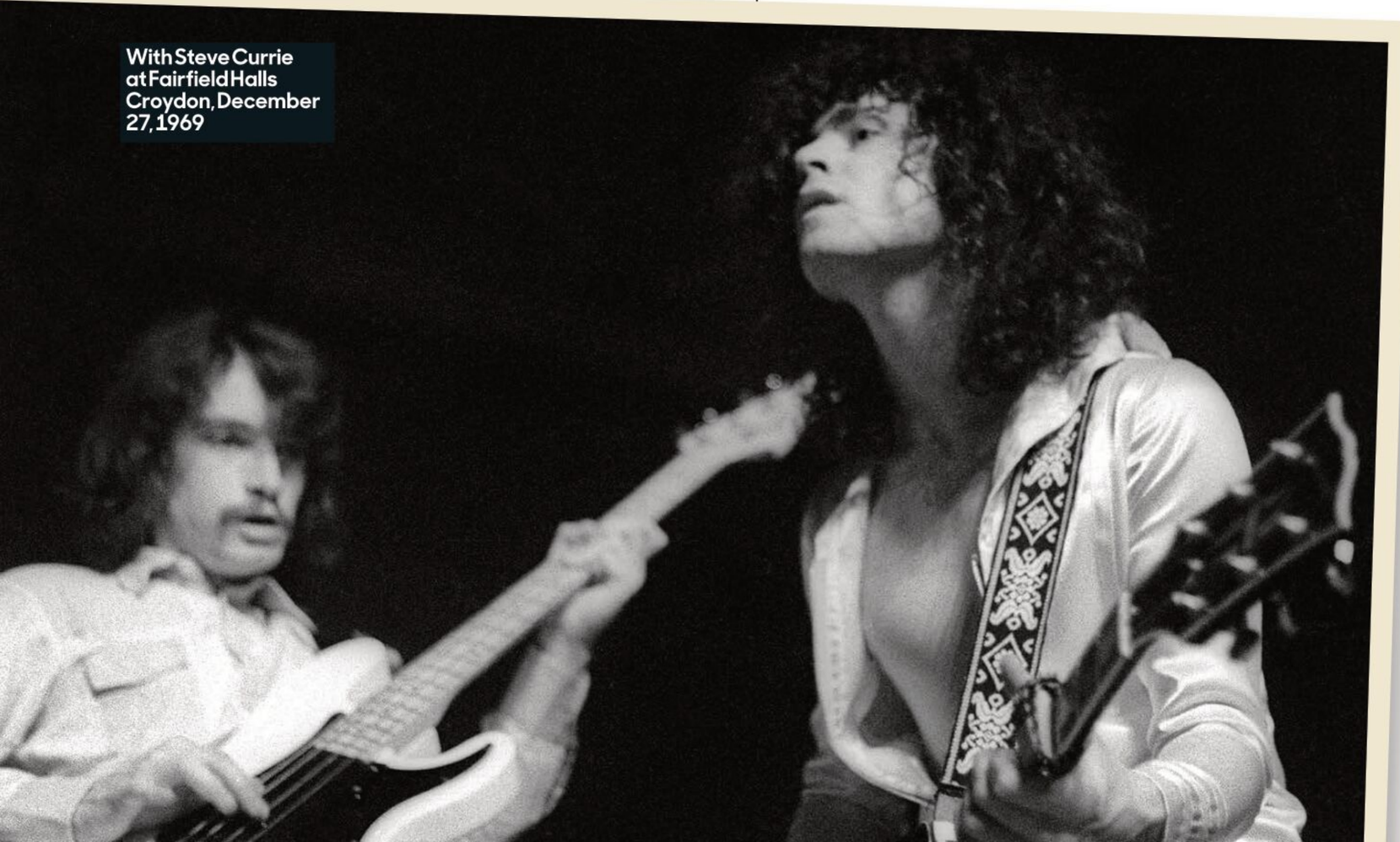
"I now really do think that the progressive era has borne fruit when you have groups like T.Rex, Family, Fairport etcetera getting hit records in the same breath as people like Gerry Monroe and Shirley Bassey.

"Of course as it got more of a business, managers realised that if you called your group progressive then you automatically had an audience. And for a time at the beginning the audience was gullible enough to accept a group called, let's say, Rameses Bullet and presume they were really good."

That happened, says Bolan, with a number of American acts who were hyped in Britain as Underground groups but were known as pop groups in the States. He cites Steppenwolf, Blue Cheer and The Doors as examples.

"I think there are a lot of groups who have conveniently assumed the tag progressive when, in fact, they are just competent pop groups, and that is all. The competency being that they can play their instruments whereas in the straight pop group of five years ago some of them didn't play on their records.

"The charts are still full of those kind of groups



With Steve Currie at Fairfield Halls Croydon, December 27, 1969

RAY STEVENSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

today... But hopefully music has progressed to the stage where it encompasses everything and I do believe that Underground music is now purely teenage music. It is youth music."

Would it be true to say, though, that as it has become more a majority than a minority interest, musical standards have become lower and the initial ideals become blurred? "It's become a business and obviously that does apply; and there are one of two major groups that we know who were in fact pop groups, but had very shrewd management which has turned it around so they appear to be something they are not. Something that is a valuable commodity to the Underground market.

"Then again... you have groups like Black Sabbath who I don't think are bad but aren't particularly brilliant by any means.

"That sort of group is just simulating Led Zeppelin and Led Zeppelin are way above their level. But they fill the gap and consequently they are blown up to huge proportions... because they are the only groups playing supposedly heavy music."

If that is so, then doesn't this have a harmful effect on what the Underground hoped to achieve? "I think it could backfire terribly in that some of those groups in two/three years' time will be dustmen very easily. The minute the bubble bursts.

"Another good example is Taste. A group that was playing for a long time and suddenly within two months they were rocketed out of all proportions. I wouldn't say without merit, because I am not going to judge.

"But there was a market for them; they were pushed into that market. Consequently they became hugely successful because they had a guitar star.

"I am sure one could do a Monkees with any group. Give them a pretty name, a handsome looking lead guitarist and you're off, man. You're a millionaire."

Then the ideals have failed? "I don't think so, because those groups are pop groups. I don't think there's any pretence with anyone who knows about music to assume that a lot of those bands are anything more than that. A lot of those people, if there was no money in being a progressive band would, perhaps, immediately become a bubblegum group."

Have musical standards improved at all then? "With some groups yes, like Family who were around at the beginning, like Fairport... who have just grown or changed personnel but basically are playing the same music. But now they have spent two years in a recording studio and are capable of producing more pleasing sounds to the ear.

"I think by Black Sabbath's own admission they made their *Paranoid* album in about two days. They went in and did it and came out again. I have no downer on that... we made our first album in the same way... but I've since learned that that's not the way you make records.

"It is not a lasting thing and one gets very dissatisfied with the result. I do think that they will be dissatisfied with what they are doing now in two years' time... hopefully... because one must grow as a musician. I won't say it is not good, because for stompy-feet music it's a gas. It fits the bill and they've got a guitar star and crosses round their necks, and let's hope Jesus looks after them."

Redcar Jazz Club, Coatham Hotel, Redcar, June 14, 1970

"AUDIENCES AREN'T ALWAYS THE WISEST JUDGES OF MUSIC"
MARC BOLAN

Could it be that progressive musicians have become over serious and lost sight of the need to entertain, thus explaining the acceptance of groups like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin with a more direct form of music...? "For a start I would exclude Led Zeppelin from that because they are five pedestals higher and better and I do believe they are progressive: *Led Zeppelin III* is progressive. I personally don't find it as satisfactory as *Led Zeppelin II* because I just really groove on them as a heavy band.

"I think they do that beautifully. But I do think they have grown... not stunted their growth with wanting to know whether it will sell or not. What groups who reach that height must do is keep their heads together and not assume that what they are doing now, because it gets standing ovations, is the end of their growth. Standing ovations can stunt growth very quickly because audiences aren't always the wisest judges of music."

On the business side have there been any changes, or is it just that the managers and agents have longer hair and "hippie" clothes? "No it's exactly the same, identical. It's showbiz. There really are some exceptions, some good people, but yes they grow their hair long because... there is a youth market, but I think that if tomorrow it was uncool to have long hair they would all have a haircut, which is frightening.

"Tin Pan Alley does exist but I am not a part of it and all the people I respect aren't really involved in that."

So if the initial ideal could be summarised as honesty and integrity how much is there of it about after 3–4 years? "I don't know... because I think the only good thing that has come out of the last five years of pop music is that someone like myself can write hits. As a child I was always fascinated by studios and music and now I am allowed to make that music and have a say in what I do, which five years ago would never have happened.

"Most of the young writers now are producing their own records and with the proceeds of '... White Swan' I could build a recording studio, in which case it will enable me to be more self-sufficient. People like John Lennon and Pete Townshend have their own studios so, if tomorrow the music business completely turned their back on us, we could still make records and get them through to the people.

"In that case we have succeeded. The monopoly is broken; there is total confusion. In that respect the revolution is already over." ✪ *NICK LOGAN*

GRAHAM LOWE/GETTY IMAGES

T.REX

RELEASED | DECEMBER 18, 1970

Their first hit single in the bag, Bolan and Finn maintain a steady course. Acoustic frolics are still within sight as they pilot their abbreviated beast towards an electric destiny. BY JIM WIRTH

IN the months following the release of T.Rex's first major hit single "Ride A White Swan" in October 1970, Marc Bolan underwent the most significant transformation of his career. As the track began to climb the charts, Bolan was suddenly awakened to the possibilities that genuine pop stardom presented, and his former existence as a cross-legged folk pixie hastily abandoned. As his producer Tony Visconti put it: "He wanted to be seen as a folk-rock poet, but once teenage girls started screaming at the shows he had to become a pop star."

Inevitably, there were casualties. "When Marc saw the doors he'd been banging on for so long suddenly start to open, he did go a bit mad," his one-time mentor John Peel remembered. "It was one of those things where I phoned up to see what we'd be doing next weekend, and somebody answered the phone and said: 'Look, Marc's very busy. Can he call you back?' And then he never did."

An impish electric doodle written in the Notting Hill pad he shared with his first wife June Child, "Ride A White Swan" was twisted into a commercial pop masterpiece by Visconti, his handclap percussion and string arrangement creating the blueprint for the music that would make Bolan his fortune. However, the decision to omit the single from the tracklisting of the album recorded at the same summer 1970 sessions tells its own story about Bolan's troubled initial relationship with the song.

"I expected to get a lot of aggravation from people saying 'It's too electric' or whatever," he said a few years later. The way his former John's Children manager Simon Napier-Bell saw it, Bolan knew that "Ride A White Swan" could be a game-changer, but was wary of humiliation in the event that he sold out unsuccessfully: "He was scared of losing what he'd built up and still not getting what he wanted."

As it happened, by the time *T.Rex* slid into the new release racks in the week before Christmas 1970, it must already have seemed to Bolan like a slightly regrettable throwback. A tentative shuffle away from the acoustic weirdery of the four LPs he recorded as Tyrannosaurus Rex, *T.Rex* occasionally hints at what was to follow with 1971's oeuvre-defining *Electric Warrior*. However, as "Ride A White Swan" completed its 11-week journey to No 2 in the charts in January 1971, the handsome hippie boy on the cover of the *T.Rex* album no longer existed. The bit between his teeth, he recorded his first No 1 single "Hot Love" – full drum kit and all – in the same month. The glitter makeup was in the post.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"His guitar playing, delicate little riffs, edgy bursts and descriptive fragments, colour around the melodies perfectly in a style that owes little to anyone other than Marc Bolan."
NICK LOGAN, NME, DECEMBER 12, 1970

"A valid rock album, heavier than they've ever attempted before. It's a more electric Rex and for most of the time a fine gelling between the most musical stuff Bolan's done, and the most funky."
ROY HOLLINGWORTH, MELODY MAKER, DEC 26, 1970

After the messy genesis of *A Beard Of Stars*, change was coming one way or another. A move to a new label – music publisher David Platz's new Fly imprint – offered the prospect of a rethink. Post-rationalising shamelessly in 1973, Bolan claimed that the abbreviation of the band's name from Tyrannosaurus Rex to T.Rex in 1970 marked a purposeful change of gear, acoustic caterpillar to electric butterfly. "I felt that I'd done all I could within that realm," he explained. "I just had to change it as I just thought I 'd have gone the same way as the Incredible String Band – slow drive into nowhere, getting hung up on the same riff."

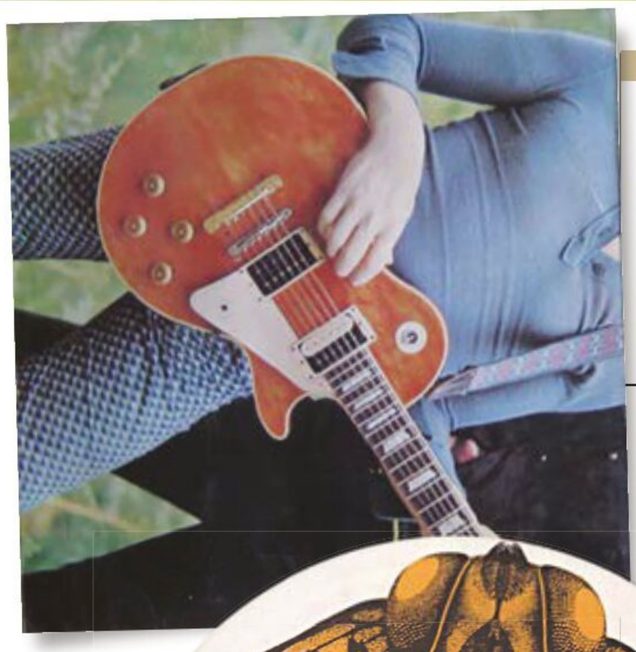
However, if he talked a good game in hindsight, *T.Rex* is still closer to the courtly love-ins of the first two Tyrannosaurus Rex albums than the gong-bang of *Electric Warrior*. The keyboard sounds plastered over intro and outro "The Children Of Rarn" – itself a refugee from an abandoned Tolkien-blues opera – add a new colour to Bolan's palette, but to a great extent *T.Rex* is still one man and his bongo player.

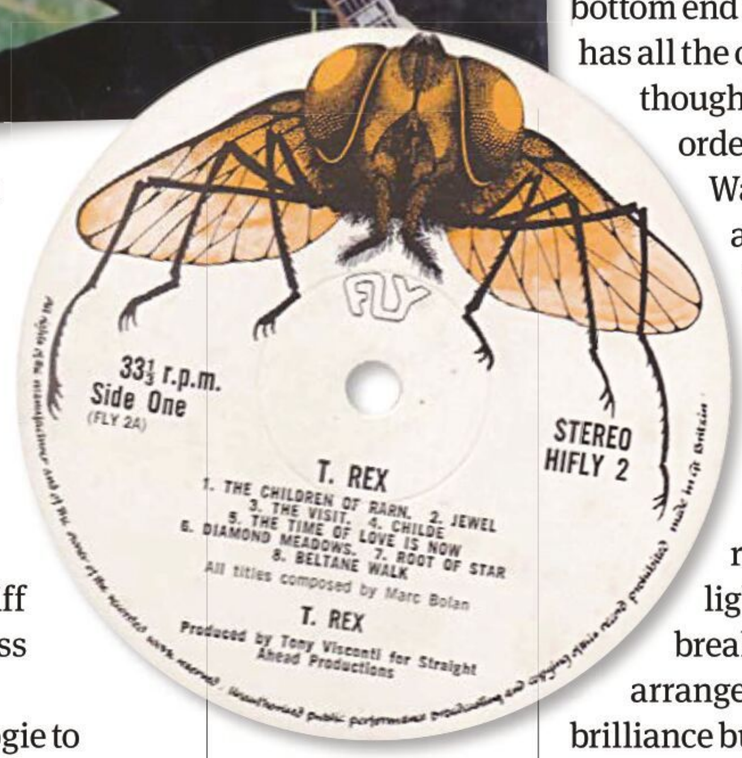
Naturally, that's no bad thing. The recorder-laced "The Time Of Love Is Now" and the string quartet backed "Diamond Meadows" are among his most bewitching mystical love songs, while "Sun Eye" is his best sub-Syd Barrett impressionistic jumble (killer pay-off line:

TRACKMARKS

1. The Children Of Rarn ★★★
2. Jewel ★★★
3. The Visit ★★★
4. Childe ★★★
5. The Time Of Love Is Now ★★★★
6. Diamond Meadows ★★★★
7. Root Of Star ★★★
8. Beltane Walk ★★★★
9. Is It Love? ★★★
10. One Inch Rock ★★★
11. Summer Deep ★★★★
12. Seagull Woman ★★★
13. Suneye ★★★★
14. The Wizard ★★
15. The Children Of Rarn (Reprise) ★★★

Label: Fly
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Trident, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar, bass, organ), Mickey Finn (drums, bass, pixiphone, vocals), Tony Visconti (bass, piano, recorder), Howard Kaylan (vocals), Mark Volman (vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 7; US –





A TENTATIVE SHUFFLE AWAY FROM THE ACOUSTIC WEIRDERY OF THE FOUR TYRANNOSAURUS REX LPS

"tyrannosaurus rex, the eater of cars"). However, there is still a sense of Bolan feeling around in the dark, hoping that he could ride into the new decade with his whimsical MO largely unchanged. The inclusion of freak-out re-recordings of his 1966 debut single "The Wizard" and impish frug "One Inch Rock" suggest Bolan was not overburdened with new ideas.

THE shapes of things to come are there if you scratch around. There were electric bits on *A Beard Of Stars*, and plenty more on *T.Rex*. "Jewel" is the hardest riff to be accompanied only by bass and bongos. "Childe" offers a skeletal take on the Bolan boogie to come, his declaration that he wants *"to give every childe the chance to dance"* sounding very much like a vision of his cosmic tomorrow. "Is It Love?" hammers hard on the bongos, but with a juddering bottom end and a strident guitar solo it has all the components of "Metal Guru", though not necessarily in the right order. The squelchy "Beltane Walk" is more a wiggle than a strut, but it's another indication of how Visconti could transform Bolan's esoteric little songs into something that might make sense outside squatland.

The producer certainly recognised how – with a little light dusting – Bolan could break out of the underground; his arrangement teases out the melodic brilliance buried within "Summer Deep", and it was his decision to bring in Frank Zappa sidekicks Flo and Eddie (aka Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan) to embellish the rudimentary "Seagull Woman". The former Turtles would come back to add extra Greek chorus drama to "Get It On" the following year.

However, while there is positive work in progress, nothing on *T.Rex* can match the impish poise of "Ride A White Swan". Bolan might have had his doubts about being seen to be flirting with bubblegum pop before the single was released, but was completely on board as it climbed the charts. T.Rex played "Ride A White Swan" twice on *Top Of The Pops* and recorded five BBC sessions from October to December 1970 to keep it on the playlist. They failed to lever Clive Dunn's "Grandad" out of the No 1 slot, but Bolan would have no regrets. Suddenly, he knew exactly where he was going. *"Catch a bright star and place it on your forehead,"* he sang. *"Say a few spells and baby, there you go."*

Portrait of the artist, March 23, 1971

"IF POP STAR IS HOW PEOPLE SEE ME, FINE"

After years on the sidelines, **MARC BOLAN**'s T.REX can finally take a moment to smell the roses. As "Hot Love" chases "Ride A White Swan" up the charts, the national elf tells of his journey from mod clothes horse to pop star, via Helen Shapiro and John's Children. "We only have 60 years on this Earth," he says, "one should fill them up with as much goodies as possible."

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

NME | JANUARY 16, 1971

EVEN with the wine Marc had put away beforehand, it must have required a good deal of precocious arrogance. A "dude" dresser from the age of 9, writer of his autobiography at 14, subject of glossy magazine features at 15, here he was at 19 making his first ever public appearance in front of six or seven million people. And he'd never sung before.

"I had no real idea how to sing," remembers Marc of that *Ready, Steady, Go!* promotion on his first solo single, "The Wizard" back in 1965. "I had only sung before in the studio when we made the record. I thought it would be easy. You just stood there and started singing and that was that."

But for the child Bolan, who'd learnt all he knew about singing from watching Cliff Richard in *Summer Holiday*, Elvis in *Loving You* and Eddie Cochran in *Untamed Youth*, that wasn't that. The result, with the band starting late behind Marc and playing in a different key, was a fiasco.

"I was so embarrassed," recalls Marc, who made a silent pledge to himself, as he left the set "to really work at being a musician from that moment on".

One-time sideman for Helen Shapiro (yes really), male model, child poet and first of the East End mods before the breed had yet been given a name by the press, Marc's has been a chequered life.

"The first time I heard music seriously," he recalls, "was through my dad who worked in Petticoat Lane and used to bring me home records. The first I had was 'Ballad Of Davy Crockett' by Bill Hayes. Remember that?"

Just in case I didn't, Marc was on hand with a half-remembered verse, *"Da-aavy, Da-aavy Crockett..."*

"I played that all the time until my dad came home one day and said, "I've got this new Bill Hayes record for you and I thought 'great'. I looked at the cover and there was this guy jumping around with a guitar. I said, 'But Dad, this isn't Bill Hayes, this is Bill Haley.' It was a real downer. But I played it... 'Rock Around The Clock', 'See You Later Alligator'... and I thought 'Wow, what's this?' Bill Hayes got thrown right out of the window..."

Apart from serving as a kid at the famed 2i's coffee bar – where incidentally he can remember Cliff Richard being thrown out for jamming in the downstairs room – Bolan's next brush with the temptingly attractive world of rock'n'roll occurred at the Hackney Empire, where *Oh Boy!* was being filmed weekly and where the 'fave' rock stars of the day could be seen and idolised and later imitated in front of the mirror at home, guitar clutched to breast.

Marc, as yet, couldn't actually play the thing, but he could pluck a nifty tea-chest bass, his dexterity on which got him a placing with a local outfit – not so much church hall as street corner group – glorying under the name of Susie And The Hula-Hoops. Lead singer was Helen Shapiro. It was when the friends of that period grew apart, and Miss Shapiro went on to be a teenage star – "I couldn't relate to that because it was outside my neighbourhood and that was all I knew" – that Marc got into the clothes scene.

The Life Of Beau Brummel being one of the first books he got deeply into, he'd been a 'smart dresser' from as early as nine but at 13 fell in with an older crowd from Stamford Hill for whom clothes had become a way of life. These were the early days of what was to ignite the whole mod cult and the Carnaby Street bonanza.

"Visually," remembers Marc, "these cats were amazing. They were about 20 when I first knew them, but I decided that that was where I wanted to be too and by the time I was 14 I had the same sort of respect they had in the neighbourhood."

So strong became their reputation, spreading further afield than the immediate East End, that when the national press realised not only that mods existed but that they would make good copy, Marc and his friends were the people they went to.

Cat black... and the "dude" dresser: with Loog (named after Andrew Loog Oldham) at Marc's flat, 22 Manchester Street, London W1, October 1965

AT 15, *Town* magazine was devoting an article to Marc's wardrobe and his views. He got out, he says, when the media moved in but claims that if you went around certain parts of the East End and mentioned Marc Feld, his real name, there would still be people who would remember. His obsession for clothes came to an end when the family moved to Wimbledon – "because nothing ever happened there".

Leaving school, he "went into exile for two or three years, like Beau Brummel had done". A living of about £4 a week was made nicking records from second-hand record shops and selling them back. He also did a bit of male modelling for John Temple, the tailors, among others, and then, having learnt by then how to play as well as pose with guitar – with assistance from the Bert Weedon *Play In A Day* instructor – he set about breaking into music.

"A FIVER A NIGHT AND A CAB HOME WE GOT WHEN WE STARTED... WOW, THAT WAS REALLY LIVING"
MARC BOLAN

He made demos for everyone and anyone, failed an EMI recording test singing Betty Everett's "You're No Good" and finally signed with Decca to cut "The Wizard", a new extended version of which is on the current *T.Rex* album. From that first abortive *RSG!* he went again into a form of exile, cutting himself off from former friends and associates – as well as Decca – to learn the art of songwriting. His difficulty was a lack of anywhere to play. The Underground was non-existent and the choice for a solo performer singing his own songs with a guitar was either folk clubs or rag balls. "I knew that the kids were there, though," says Marc, "because they were buying Dylan records."

It was with producer/manager Simon Napier-Bell that Bolan made his second solo record, "Hippy Gumbo". A press handout of the time was recording such illuminating facts as "Likes: £9,000 cars. Dislikes: £8,000 cars."

Again through friendship with what was then the elitist circle of the day he was able to do a further *RSG!* promotion. "I wasn't ashamed of that one," comments Marc, who remembers it primarily as the first unforgettable television appearance of Jimi Hendrix. Despite it, the single sold about 200 copies. Napier-Bell also managed a group called John's Children who had had a minor hit with their first single. They wanted a lead guitarist. "Actually they wanted Pete Townshend and I was the nearest equivalent thing he had under contract," laughs Marc.

John's Children are probably best remembered for publicity photographs posed in the nude (before Marc joined) and their single "Desdemona" (after). The single was Marc's song all the way through, and often looked back on as a source of encouragement when things looked black. When he finally split from John's Children because he didn't like the way their music was going, Marc started Tyrannosaurus Rex. It isn't commonly known that for a brief spell they were a five-piece electric group.

Marc had modelled them on Tomorrow and they managed a few gigs at The Electric Garden, later Middle Earth. "We didn't rehearse," recalls Marc. "We didn't know about rehearsing. We thought you just went on and said, 'Here are the songs...'"

Big Rex had a short life, permanently stunted when Track Records repossessed the band's equipment. Marc, bereft of his Gibson, bought

FIONA ADAMS/GETTY IMAGES

a £12 acoustic with money his mother had given him and with Steve Took, who'd played drums with the five-piece, set up the bopping duo.

John Peel's assistance through *Perfumed Garden* and the duo's free gigs in Hyde Park aroused the initial interest and created the impetus. Before long they were back at Middle Earth. "A fiver a night and a cab home to Wimbledon we got when we started. A cab home... wow, that was really living."

NICK LOGAN

MELODY MAKER | FEBRUARY 13, 1971

MARC BOLAN, teased, stimulated and tempted by the midday wine, looned around in the rain and stood in humorous mood viewing the vast hold of Big Guy, an incredible creature whose world revolves around a meagre vault in London Zoo.

It seemed a fine idea to tear away from the world of humanoid fleas that exist around London City, and spend the day at the zoo where life, although against nature, is somewhat peaceful. "Ride A White Gorilla..." bleats Bolan. It only takes a few minutes with this guy to know what his, probably, 60 years of life will be used for – fun, with capitals on all three letters, and creation from a clean mind.

Maybe you attach some crazy notion of deepness when the name T.Rex is mentioned. Maybe you've be plain blasé and boring, mention pixie boots, toadstool armchairs and Noddy caps. Dismiss Bolan as a bit of a dreamer if you will. But in truth, you are wrong. If normality exists, and when you think about it there's no such thing, then Marc Bolan is possible the closest to a valid, honest human you'll ever wish to meet. He's open, absurdly funny at times. He might resort to imagery but that's far from being an own-up. He's an entertainer if you like an image in a pop world of images. But again, he's honest.

We gorged our meat. They serve excellent meals at the zoo. The wine sped down.

The waitress tells Marc he's a good-looking bloke. There's a laugh, and another bottle of wine. Bolan is extremely talkative: you just tap the bottle and it all spills out. Does it ever bore you to be termed as the 'National Elf', or the pixie, or the gnome musician, or whatever?

"No, it never bothers me. I only hope people write down what they think. I never think of myself like that, because I never see a picture. I don't even know what I look like, you only see it backwards. I've never seen the group on stage; I've never even seen a film of what we do. I've got a sort of idea of the image we want to project, and that's of a human being expressing the feelings inside him to other human beings.

"And I'm very flattered that some human beings can listen with love in some cases. That's cool. But I never imagine all the 450,000 people who bought 'Ride A White Swan' thought about it. Basically there were probably about 50,000 people who really cared about it. The single thing, though, is a whole new phase, a phase which I needed, because I was becoming stale."

HOW has a hit single really hit you as a person? "I don't really think it really ever does. I'm astounded. I don't think you are ever fully aware of it. I think it's important for the fact that people are taking us far more seriously. I don't mean intellectually, but just being noticed by people who just thought us a name that was totally unsellable. And hopefully, because I'm a person and not a pop star.

"Then me getting into the Top 20 – as a musician alongside the pop stars – opens up a great thing. It's fabulous. I mean the charts used to be full of Beatles and Cream, but then there was a great lapse when they didn't put out singles so regularly. I'd really like Dylan to put out more singles. Because between each album there's such a change in character it almost blows you over. If he puts out singles, you'd be able to see how he changed. You'd be able to see where he was. As it is, suddenly he's got a new voice, I mean, to take myself as a writer. I'm not using the same imagery as I did before, and the change is on record for all to hear."

You say your imagery has changed, for the better or worse? "I'm no judge, none at all. It's certainly sold more records, and people are happy to say wow, he's laughing all the way to the bank. But I can't understand all that bit, all I know is that what I'm doing now is appealing to more people. But that's no reason for me to stick to that. I mean 'Ride A White Swan' was a song I did in two hours, it was good, fine. I'm conscious now of deciding whether to put out a follow-up or forget singles completely.

"But I do think they are important, and possibly we will put another out.

Hopefully it will be a hit, because that's fun. I mean we only have 60 years on this Earth, and one should fill them up with as much goodies as possible. It excites me at this period of my life to be on the cover of pop

RON HOWARD/REDFERNS)

T.Rex performing "Get It On" on *Top Of The Pops*, July 7, 1971 (King Crimson's Ian McDonald on sax, second left)

T. Rex in 1971: (l-r) Bill Legend, Marc Bolan, Mickey Finn, and Steve Currie

papers, when for years we had not one line mentioned. That's a buzz, but not a serious buzz. I never sit down and say, 'Oh we've got to have a cover.' If people say they want one, then that's a gas."

But do you ever see yourself as a pop star, or being changed into one? "No, there's no-one to do it, you see. We are all in control of it. We just act naturally. If a pop star is how the people see me, fine, but there's no pressure anywhere. It's fun, that's all."

How does it strike you when someone like Jimmy Young plays your record, though? "I'm just very flattered. If I met him I'd say thank you. I don't care what his motives are; he's just played it, when he needn't. I have no disrespect for any Radio One disc jockeys, but the fact is I never listen to it. As a musician I can't afford the time."

Was there ever a time, maybe a couple of years back, when you hated the commercial pop business? "No, never. There were always pop records that I liked; and you could use the Top 20 as a gauge. People always look to the obvious... to Radio One we are now possibly regarded as a brand-new group called T.Rex."

Did you ever feel there was a "deep and meaningful" aura surrounding T.Rex, and the underground units as a whole? "No, look, music is music, and it comes from deep inside one – you can't get any deeper than that. That's why most things that children say are so good, because they don't have to think first. I wouldn't say that my songs are intellectually valid, but I'll tell you certain songs that to me were very important, songs that were written with great feeling. '...White Swan' wasn't one of them. But that doesn't matter, it's of no importance,

"THERE'S ONE THREAD OF SANITY THAT ALWAYS HOLDS ME TOGETHER"
MARC BOLAN

'...White Swan' has imagery, some of it is maybe image provoking.

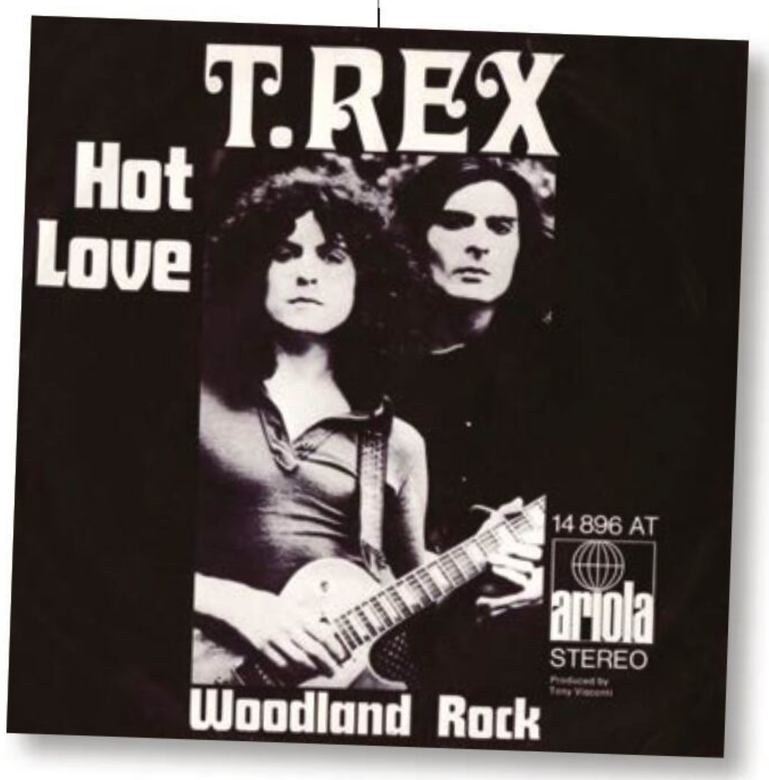
"That's very amazing; it's great to be able to conjure up a picture in someone's head. A cat riding a swan blows my mind anyway, because people travel about on jets, and you could fly on birds. What greater thing than to fly on than a giant condor, or a golden eagle. That's what it's about; it's just a vibe, nothing more. I don't want to write about 'Do you love me baby, eh, oh yeah'. If I can write just a bit more than what we've come to expect as pop music, I'll be happy. That 'Push Bike' song [*by The Mixtures, a 1971 hit*] could have been about something, whereas it's about nothing at all. But that's a personal thing. I'm aware you've got to have a hummable melody – but 'Tambourine Man' was the most hummable melody of all time – and it was powerful.

"I'm not paranoid about the pop scene; I mean there's a lot of underground bands that I just don't dig at all. There's a lot of bad sounds in the underground today – there weren't five years ago – or three years ago, when there were, say, only five bands. And they've all made it. A lot of people have jumped on that fad, like when it's worn out and we go back to calypso bands, they will all do that."

Does your mind ever take your body over? "No, because there's one thread of sanity that always holds me together. That's why I'll never freak. I've been on the verge of it so many times, almost once a week. You know, I'm going to give up. I'm going to pack in music. I very often feel like not being involved with people."

Why do you feel that? "Because it's such a hassle. And sometimes it's such a strong hassle."

Can you see a remedy for that? "No. But maybe



REX SHUTTERSTOCK

"I WANT TO GET INTO COSMIC ROCK"

AT THE START OF THE YEAR, MARC OFFERS SOME PREDICTIONS – "KIDS WILL LOOSEN UP" – AND PICKS THE ONES TO WATCH: YES, LENNON AND, OF COURSE, HIMSELF...

MELODY MAKER | JANUARY 2, 1971

AS 1971 dawns upon the world of pop, in a mood of cynical optimism and with a cheerful hangover, the critics are to be heard girding up their typewriters.

Predictions are the mode of a New Year's Day. Having gorged on venison and festive pastries, stomachs are rumbling a chorus of soothsaying. But who is best to judge the twists and turns of the fortunes of the music business? Better an artist might speak and a critic hold his tongue. And who better to rock around the crystal toadstool than Marc Bolan of T. Rex? For last year saw the climax of much hard work and struggle. Tyrannosaurus Rex got a hit record. And Marc, underground poet, loves pop, right back to the days of Joe Jones and "You Talk Too Much" and Terry Stafford's "Suspicion".

Speaking to him by pixiephone on a bright snowy morning this week, Marc explained through a mouthful of breakfast Fairy Dust that "Eric, George, Elvis and Bob have just popped in – can you hold on a minute?"

After a suggestion that he stop name-dropping, Mr Bolan was induced to cast his mind over the horrors and joys the future might hold in store.

Marc Bolan, do you as a young and British pop star see in 1971 changes that may affect the lives of each and every one of us, so help us God? Well – it will be very much full circle.

What in blazes are you talking about? Well, some groups will go from strength to strength. I wouldn't like to say which.

For goodness sake, man, spit it out! Well, you know what I mean.

No, dammit, give us facts, names, something to go on. Well, I've heard some good vibes about Yes, and I wish they would do well. Success depends so much on the record companies. They are now much more aware of the power of promotion. Curved Air proved that when they were given opportunity by their record company. People went out and bought the record.

I think live gigs will be better this year. From our point of view they are really exciting. Kids will loosen up and dance more. We did a gig at Brighton on a sprung dance floor and it was going up and down six inches.

What new will happen in America? America is really dry now and at the end of the superstar thing. Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman of the Mothers Of Invention don't think anything is happening there at all, except Elton John and even that is part of the superstar image. I'm sure there is an undercurrent somewhere – a new Creedence. But for real progression – have you heard the new Lennon LP yet? That knocks me out as a great record. Technically and emotionally it's the record of the year. It's changed my whole approach to recording. And the drum sound – God! Ringo's like a steam hammer. There are great volcanoes of excitement on their way – I mean for the freaks, not Tin Pan Alley. That's gone.

I want to get into cosmic rock and we'll be doing a rock album of 10 tracks with Howard, of the Mothers, and Mark will be doing the backing vocals. In the coming years a lot of "instant" bands will fall apart from ego problems, and the bands who have stayed together will become even greater. I'll be interested in what Paul McCartney does when he gets together with the others. They will record together again, I'm sure. They've all done their ego numbers now, the solo LPs, and I think The Beatles will tend to get lonely. John's album sounds the most Beatley, I really hope the Beatles get together again, because it would benefit them to record together and would have a huge effect on music.

Bolan March 23, 1971.: "We're the new Led Zeppelin"

John Lennon in July 1971: sounding "Beatley"

What would you not like see in '71? What I would not like to see is a lot of huge inflation of concert prices, which happened three months ago and caused a lot of damage. Now, ticket prices are reasonable. I don't think they should all be 10s – I was quoted a bit heavy on that – but 15s to £1 should be right. Not over £1. Groups can keep down prices. You can still make money and it's a fantasy that you can't. And I wouldn't put out a single without more than two tracks or at least longer tracks. You can get eight minutes of music on a B-side if you want.

Will pop singles die? It's so hard, especially as "...White Swan" has just sold 250,000. I would have said yes two months ago. Obviously kids want singles, if they are packaged well and give at least 10 minutes music.

How about some name checks? I'd like to see Tim Renwick, the guitarist with Quiver, do well. And I'd like to see John Lennon on the road very much. That would help. And for a personal thing I'd like to see us rate big in America and I'd really like to do a monster movie.

I think it will be a year of surprises. Last year we were a folk duo, and now we're the new Led Zeppelin! ***CHRIS WELCH***

Good vibes: Yes in 1971

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES; GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/GETTY IMAGES (2)

"OH – TAKE IT OFF. SAY NO MORE!"

LISTENING BLIND, MARC TAKES A TILT AT SOME NEW (AND OLD) SOUNDS...

MELODY MAKER | APRIL 3, 1971

OLYMPICS
Western Movies
FROM THE LP *ROCK & ROLL STARS VOLUME 2*, JOY

It's funny – I've always remembered this particular record. It's the Olympics. It came out on a blue label HMV in 1959 and the producer was mumble, mumble. I think it's very good but similar to The Coasters' records of the time like "Young Blood". It's the sound of the time. The Olympics came out about two years after The Coasters. I love these records.

LOUIS JORDAN AND HIS TYMPANY FIVE **School Days**
FROM THE LP *LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL*, CORAL

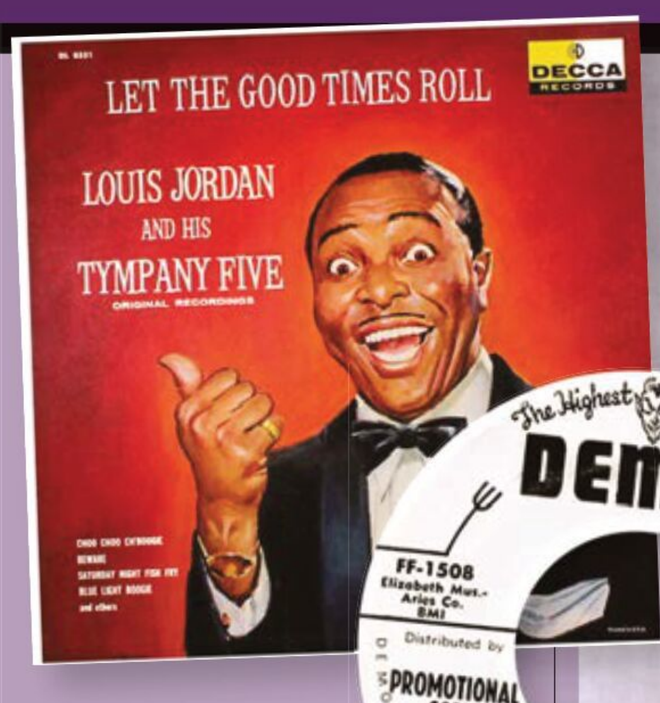
I like the sax at the beginning and I liked the first verse, but I didn't like the nursery rhymes which were so predictable. The drumming is tremendous, almost like Ringo. And the trumpet at the end was good. Yeah – enjoyed it. The words were like Chuck Berry words until it got into the nursery rhymes. Late '40s I should think, just before the rock 'n' roll thing happened. A lot of the '49 stuff by The Drifters on the Atlantic history of soul albums sound like this. It really swings. Beautiful.

JETHRO TULL
Aqualung
FROM THE LP *AQUALUNG*, CHRYSALIS

Very good. Jethro Tull, obviously; and a very important LP for the group because a lot of people have lost faith in them. This will restore interest.

Jethro Tull, London, March 1971: (l-r) Barre, Anderson, Hammond, Bunker and Evan

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



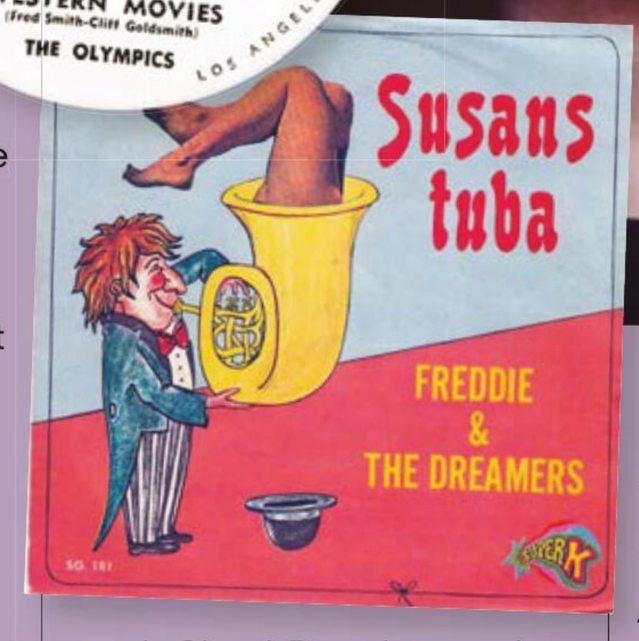
I saw a parallel in the lyrics there with Arthur Lee with the reference to "*snot*". Arthur Lee used that on *Forever Changes*. I thought the guitar solo was beautiful. I'm impressed. I don't have a bad word for this. It will take people a couple of plays to get into, but it should be huge in America.

ELVIN BISHOP GROUP
Don't Fight It (Feel It)
FROM THE LP *FEEL IT!*, FILLMORE

I don't like it at all. I thought Wilson Pickett's version was much more powerful. Sounds like an old Ike and Tina thing – Charlie and Inez Fox. Oh – hate that organ. Terrible production. Sounds like a demo studio. Obviously not Eric on guitar. It must be Colin Cattermole or Elmore Drains. No, that was terrible. I can't imagine why anyone wants to make records like that.

JOHN LEE HOOKER
Messin' With The Hook
FROM THE LP *HOOKER 'N' HEAT*, LIBERTY

Lovely guitar style. I like this very much. Is it Muddy Waters? Very similar voice. John Lee Hooker? I can tell by the guitar style. He's dynamite. Incredible guitar – it sounds like a motorbike. It's the sort of thing I'll do when I'm 40! He's playing really well. American bluesmen don't always seem to be aware of the techniques available in the studios. Buddy Guy 'live' is the greatest guitarist in the world, but his records always sound thin and



weak. Chuck Berry's records for Mercury were just the same. They don't seem to have any control over the sound. Bob Hite has produced this and really got a good sound.

AL KOOPER
Brand New Day
FROM THE LP *THE LANDLORD*, UNITED ARTISTS

Sounds like John Sebastian meets The Band. Sounds like "Mighty Quinn". Who is it? Well he's been working with Dylan, so that's probably why. I'm quite partial to his guitar playing. But this is a muzak – really. It's bad white soul – give me James Brown or Van Morrison, who does good white soul. It's sad. But you know he has made a lot of bread from the movie, so ride on, Al. I thought this work on *New Morning* was important.

PAUL BRETT SAGE
Reason For Your Askin' DAWN

I don't know who it is – Peter The Poet? Or Paul The Poet [*shakes head*]. Sounds like an old Nirvana track. Who is it? Loser name.

MAN
Daughter Of The Fireplace LIBERTY

I think I'm better than Elvis. Who said that? It was Crispian St

Peter, wasn't it? Man, did you ever see Crispian St Peter's stage act? Hmm, nice guitar here. Good old Chuck Berry. Very nice, actually. Probably American. You find so many good guitarists wasting their time in bad groups.

FREDDIE AND THE DREAMERS
Susan's Tuba PHILIPS

Beautiful production – really. I like it. It's.... unreal! It sounds like Oliver, the guy who did "Good Morning Sunshine" on acid. I'm not too in agreement with the trumpet, but it's a funky pop record. I'd say it would be a hit in America.

TOM SPRINGFIELD
Make Me An Instrument Of Your Peace PHILIPS

Oh – take it off. Say no more! I agree very strongly with the sentiments, but I'd rather hear "Power To The People" or "My Sweet Lord".

CLIFF RICHARD
Silvery Rain COLUMBIA

I'd hazard a guess and say it was Kay Starr. Oh, I hate it, and butterflies DON'T move on invisible strings. Is it Cliff? Oh give me "Move It" and "High Class Baby". He's kept abreast of the times, I'll say that. They've cleaned him, but I prefer him dirty. I don't see this as a hit unless it gets massive TV promotion.

growth, maturity, learning to understand other people. It's always egotistical things you freak on. Like why are they doing this to ME, why are they saying this about ME. Why am I like this? If you can somehow see their problems in you, you might begin to understand them. And you'll perhaps begin to see an answer to those problems. But it does no good worrying about them, because you aren't going to change them. The only answer is suicide – and that's the biggest cop-out of all time. It's the lowest, I mean you'll only die, go up there, and come down again. We are here for it; it's a lesson if you like."

Do you believe we've been sent here by somebody, then? Do you believe in God? "I believe in a cosmic force, which is partial to humanity. I won't say its God, for God is a term people call things."

Why do you think people go to church then? "Because they are insecure, it's somewhere to go. I can wake up in the morning, look in a mirror and see God – see a human being. We are all capable of great thought, and if we can channel them into one thing, then they are the Godly thoughts. I'm a very religious person, but not in any set religion. I mean, how are you supposed to worship God. He's very unlikely to be HIM anyway, but if you want to visualise God as being Desperate Dan, then that's a groove.

"If he comes down he's not going to look anything like you or me. He's not going to come down and say, 'Hey baby, let's groove.' Yet maybe he'd appear to us like that, because he knows that maybe it's the only way we can think."

Are you ego-conscious? "I don't like it, but I'm very aware of what I'm thinking. And that's a cancel-out, it never allows the ego thing to go too far. I choose the music industry, or rather the image industry, because it was one way of putting my fantasies into reality without hurting anybody, or forgetting myself. I mean you can't still look at a picture of yourself in the papers and think you are still a groove. You can't believe that you are anything above or better. It's a living, and you are still a piece of paper, or card. Whatever that thing is that people think you are – you are not. And if you think you are, you're a hung-up person.

"I know that I would be quite happy to play if people just gave me food. If people enjoyed the music it would be a buzz. It would possibly give me a greater buzz than, say, making money. If I made money I'd rather give it away than let it fall into the hands of some cigar-smoking dude."

What do you mean by cigar-smoking dudes? "The promoter guys who promote Shane Earwig, who's never going to make it in a million years. I don't hate them; I just want nothing to do with them."

If the pop vehicle wasn't available, how would you use your mind? "I'd write science-fiction novels, and write on my experiences, and what I feel. Not prophetic stuff. I've always assumed that people like to listen to what I say, maybe I'm wrong. It's not an ego thing. I just feel I'm giving something to people."

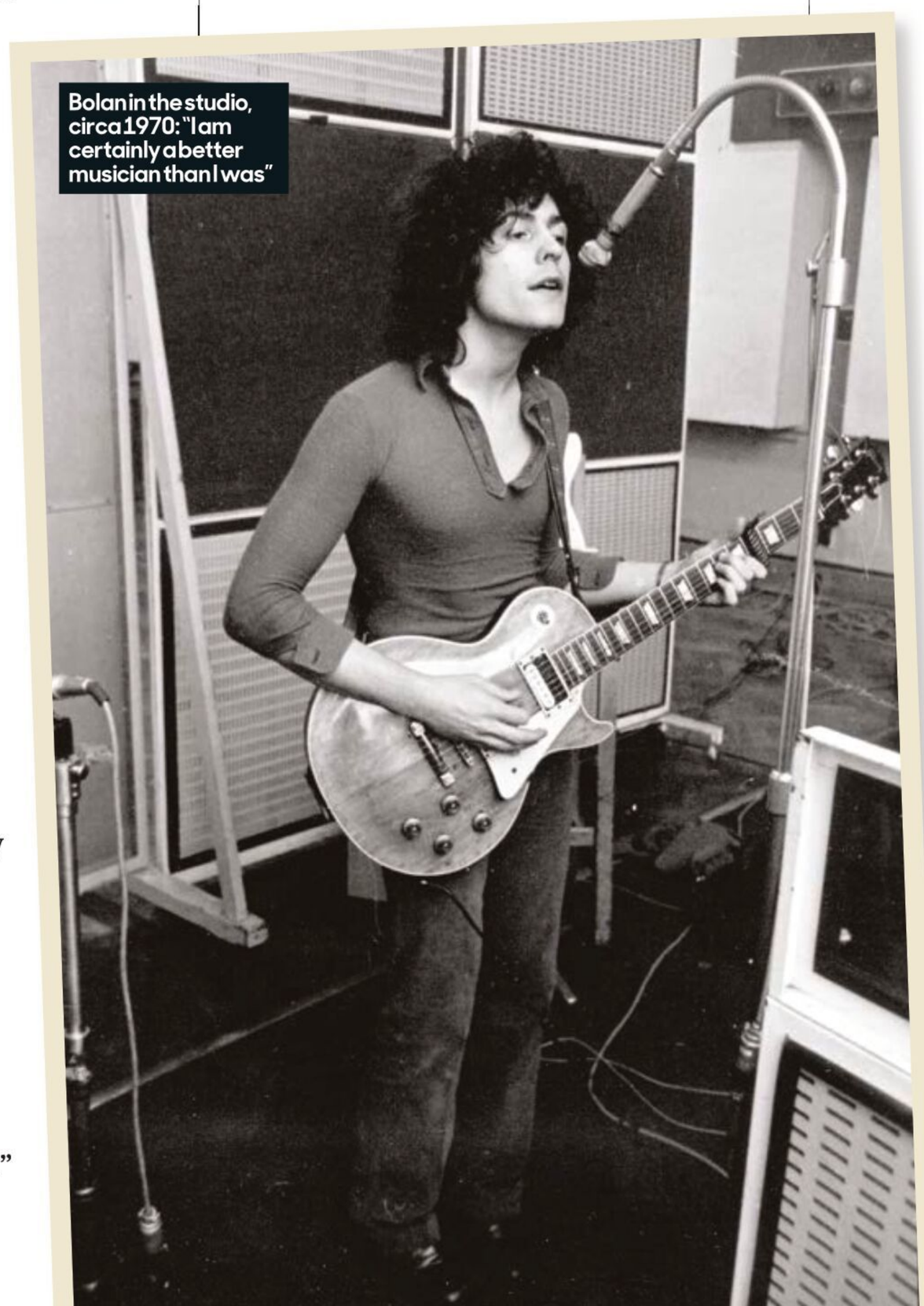
Are you as sincere as you could be? "I don't really know what sincerity is. I'm always truthful. I might be – but I don't think you ever know. I'm a human. What I put down on records is always better than what I project, because it's the artistic side. If we could all wear our fantasies on our coat sleeves, we'd all be Fellini freaks. There are no normal people. All I'm trying to do is wear my fantasies on my head. There is no norm; I'll say it again, there is no reality, there is no security, and we are all dying."

Do you believe in reincarnation? "Yes, I certainly do, I can remember things from my past lives. 'The Children Of Rarn' is from my past. Things just occur that are inexplicable in normal life."

"IF GOD COMES DOWN HE'S NOT GOING TO COME DOWN AND SAY, 'HEY BABY, LET'S GROOVE'"
MARC BOLAN

But what if you were born again as a totally unimaginative person? "It's got to happen. It's part of a person's evolution. I'm sure once that I was a Celtic bard – that would certainly account for my knowledge of poetry, for I wasn't very well educated and there's no real reason for me being like this."

You talk of your education – what do you think of today's standards? "I'd never send a kid of mine to a school now. I'd rather not have him learn anything. Too much of nothing is being pumped into kids. I don't know what I'd do with him, though. It's quite possible that in 30 years all the young people, the groovy people, will up and buy a continent. No politics, no leaders. We don't need them, you see. Why do we need them?"
ROY HOLLINGWORTH


Bolan in the studio, circa 1970: "I am certainly a better musician than I was"

MELODY MAKER | MARCH 6, 1971

MARC BOLAN, leader of T.Rex and the original British underground hero, hit back this week at fans who have accused him of "selling out". His latest 'Cosmic Rock' single "Hot Love" hit this week's chart at 21 and "Ride A White Swan", is still in the Pop 30. He told the *MM*: "My only aim is to communicate in music and as long as the result of the communication is not detrimental to the music, I am happy. I sincerely believe in our music, which has grown into major recognition to become a major pop band or underground band.

"The few people who are saying we have sold out – their outlook is so narrow and they are denying us and other groups the right to grow naturally with our music. My sentiment to the music is not changed and I am certainly a better musician than I was, and a better song-writer. I am pleased T.Rex are no longer an obscure band. The people who said 'sell out' to Dylan didn't do him any harm at all."

In the first week of release, "Hot Love" sold 40,000 copies – more than "Ride A White Swan" sold in the first six weeks of release. In some West End record shops this week "Hot Love" was nearly reaching the incredible sales figures of George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord".

John Peel, who's been campaigning for T.Rex for years, told *MM* this week: "I didn't thing people could ignore something as good as T.Rex indefinitely. I always assumed T.Rex would make it from 'Debora' on."

T.Rex leave for their first [*sic, their third after dates in 1969 and 1970*] US tour at the end of this month. They'll be away for five weeks and play a coast-to-coast series of concerts, including the two Fillmores. Talking about the trip, Marc said: "Over there people look upon us as an avant-garde English pop group. So far the vibes have been very intellectual, so they are going to be very surprised."

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"I WANTED TO EXCITING - NOT IN DEDICATED

Road-hardened by a second US tour, T.Rex and "Get It On" are stoking the
Still, for a stolid few success is **MARC**'s "Judas" moment. "She said, 'You've sold

Marc and June Bolan, Detroit, April 1971

MAKE LIFE MORE BUM ALONG OBSCURITY"

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES

flames of Bolan mania as the band leave folk and the "underground" behind. out,"" says Marc of one backstage visitor. "She said, 'Own up, Marc – it's rubbish.""

NME | MAY 15, 1971

"I REALLY feel like I should be playing the tiny clubs," says Marc Bolan, adding through a smile, "Or getting Jeff Dexter to put us on at Implosion, phoning up and saying, 'Look, Jeff, how about a gig?'"

As T.Rex engage on their first real major British tour – it started on Sunday at Bournemouth – Bolan attempts not so much to put down his own and his band's abilities but to examine his attitudes to the T.Rex success, to come to terms with the fact that the humble little duo he formed with the now departed Steve Took some three or four years ago is currently headlining and packing to capacity such venues as Manchester Free Trade, Bristol Colston and Leicester De Montfort Halls.

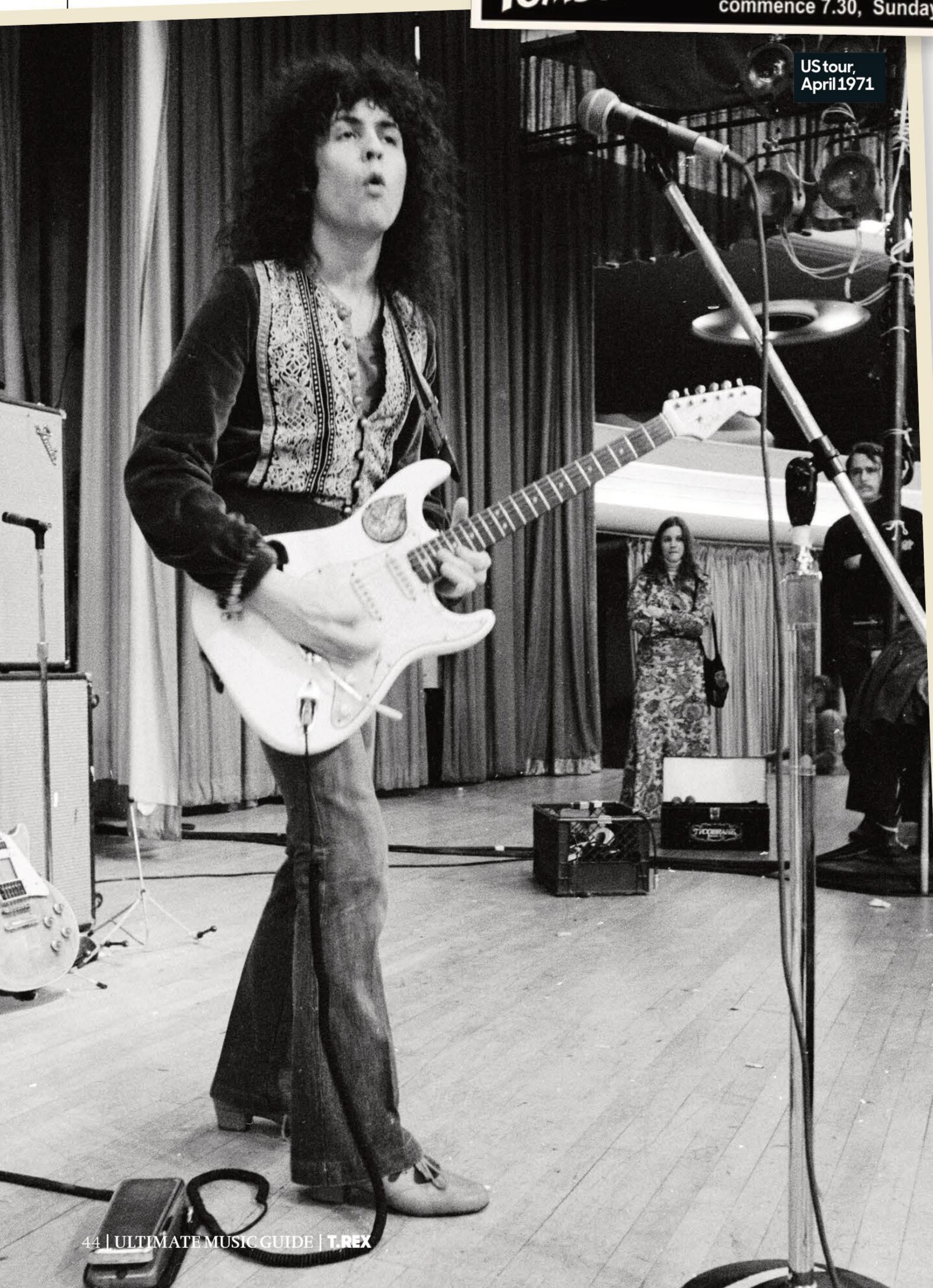
What excited him most, he professed when we met on Friday – five days back from a month with T.Rex in the States and a few days away from the British tour – was the fact that every gig was an advance sell out.

"I feel very humble about the whole thing," admitted Marc, fitting in our interview between rehearsals. "I feel as though I just started; in the same frame of mind as when we were playing Middle Earth. I am really excited, I don't know what to do; I have no idea how to approach the people who will come along...

"I suppose I will explain that I am so pleased they are there. People that is... not records or showbiz or charts... just people. Because they could so easily not be there.

"I am very conscious of needing to understand them. But all I can do is be me. I feel I might just go on stage and burst into tears, which to me would be a gas. I truly believe that everyone who listens to your records... you have a love affair with them, I am very aware of their feelings.

"In America we didn't have those vibes for a month. We got heckled at the Fillmore and I insulted two people in the front row. I said, 'Instead of you, we could be at home playing to people who want to see us.' The audience applauded, and afterwards I didn't believe I'd said it. 'Did I really say that?' But that was how I felt."


US tour, April 1971

AMERICA apparently took a mixed view of Bolan, Finn, Currie and Fifield [*Bill Legend*], the latter the drummer added to T.Rex shortly before they left for the States. At places like the Whiskey in Los Angles they sold out for two consecutive nights, while in Detroit the band scored its biggest success down the bill to Detroit-based Paul Butterfield (the first night was quarter full, the second packed to capacity with all but a couple of hundred of the audience leaving before Butterfield closed).

The Fillmore East gigs weren't so hot, with T.Rex restricted in time, although there are other reasons why Bolan won't be counted among those mourning the closing of Bill Graham's rock auditoriums.

"I didn't enjoy playing there," says Marc – who said goodbye to the Fillmore audience by splitting his trousers on the final number of the final show and letting it all hang out – "because the management is of such a low mentality. Even the janitors think they are superstars."

In general, though, the tour – T.Rex's second, the first being over two years ago – was a satisfying if not runaway success. It got both "Hot Love" and the band's current album onto the American charts and then booked back for a further tour in July which, says Marc," is how I know it was good.

"There was a lot of good feedback and a lot more people knew of the band than we expected. If we had done any better it would have felt hyped. We went in as a rock group and consequently played so much harder. It tightened us up, tightened me up a lot. It was like a battle and I feel we won it. I can still feel the effects... I feel like I'm travelling at 200 miles per hour."

Marc saw little encouragement in the American music scene itself: "Musically there is nothing happening there at all. I saw a lot of

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS

American bands die there, bands I thought would have gone down well. All the bands are 'riff city'... Led Zeppelins of a couple of years ago. Or the ones we saw, only the Grateful Dead were good. They were ultra good."

Between concerts, T.Rex did make some time for recording and have in fact come home with the basis of their next album, from sessions in three days at Wally Heider's studio in LA – augmented by Mothers [*Of Invention*] vocalists Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman – and two days at Media Sound in New York.

For the rawness of the sound and the "roughness" of the recording technique they employed, it is, according to Bolan, totally different from either the last album or anything they've done before.

"It is nowhere near as slick as 'Hot Love'," Marc attempts to explain. "I heard 'Hot Love' on the radio when we got home and it sounded really slick and professional, and all the new stuff has talking on it and is very rough. 'Hot Love' started out as a raunchy little backing track which I made into the finished record. The stuff we have now has been left at the first stage, although there will be a few added bits on some. For me there is more feeling in it than every other album put together. I have never been so excited about putting a record out in my life.

"It's energy rock. Usually you start off with a track and it gets refined and overdubbed and you end up with a good tight record... but you don't get creation. Basically, what I have attempted to achieve on the new material is the sound Elvis had on those early Sun records. We've got a really raunchy guitar sound and we cut tracks in a way that they can't now be altered. There is no way I can blow the energy on them by looking at them later and being in a different mood.

"If we are ever going to get a gold album worldwide this is it. It is instant 'hum-the-songs', but the words of the songs are such that in no way can it be a sell-out. The words are very personal to the way I live. Like Neil Young [*whose American bootleg album provided the background to our conversation*]... everything he writes is so much a pop song... but the words mean so much."

NICK LOGAN

Marc in June 1971: always more influenced by Scotty Moore than the sitar

guitarist screaming and gyrating. Tyrannosaurus Rex lives on only in memory for those of us who need them."

Sad words indeed – and it's all true. Marc has changed and so have his ideas about music. Or have they? Perhaps the concept of the silver-suited star rocking "Hot Love" is only an extension of the basic Bolan approach to pop. Perhaps his fans need not get upset – only adjust and enjoy the new trend.

Disturbed by the deluge of letters from old fans, I ventured into London's Little Venice one morning this week for breakfast with Bolan. Marc has moved from his cosy nook in Notting Hill, and is temporarily residing in the apartment of a friend, with wife June, quite near Regent's Park Canal. He appeared bleary-eyed but smiling, having only got to bed at 7am after a long recording session.

Tea and toast with honey was proffered and the suntanned imp, clad in blue jean zipper jacket and trousers, took up his customary cross-legged position and attempted to explain the process of evolution which has taken the much-loved flower

"I HAVE NEVER BEEN SO EXCITED ABOUT PUTTING A RECORD OUT IN MY LIFE. IT'S ENERGY ROCK"

MARC BOLAN

power duo of '67 into the realm of hot pop.

"We've just been on holiday to the South of France," he said, explaining the sun tan. "It was the first I have ever had, and apart from ordering champagne, we didn't do anything at all."

"I was recording all last night, and it was a really good session. We did the A-side of the new single the week before and we did some other tracks for the B-side."

T.Rex's new single out on July 2 is called "Get it On" and as Marc says: "It's a real boogie. It's all boogie-woogie now, and what I'm really getting into. We did the A-side in the States and used a new technique with no screens in the studio and not putting the drummer in a booth. It's weird the way we record here. There's no need for all those screens and 'separation' in rock music. The more overlay the better. We've been doing this on everything and it sounds 'live' in the studio.

"The A-side is nothing at all like 'Hot Love'. We use saxes, piano and strings. I've no idea if we can keep up our success. Everybody has a hot period. The Stones had their up and down periods and Creedence are on a down streak.

"It's the songs that interest me. If I thought they were of lesser value than what we have done before I wouldn't put them out. 'Hot Love' sold over half a million and there have probably only been about 20 letters in all of complaint from old fans who don't like the change. If there were a million letters, then I wouldn't play anything ever again. I'd be destroyed.

"We were and still are to a certain extent, a cult group, and you are going to upset some people if you change. On our last tour we played to 5,000 people and only one girl came back to the dressing room and said, 'You've sold out.' She said, 'Own up, Marc – it's rubbish.' Obviously we have our off-nights, but there have been some incredible gigs where we played really well. For me, musically, I have never been so satisfied. We still do our acoustic set anyway, as well as the electric.

"It would be a total compromise and sell-out if we played all the same stuff we were doing two years ago. I just don't feel that way now. My words have become more spartan – certainly."

"There are Chinese poets who write one poem for four years and then say just three words." Here Marc gave an extraordinary impersonation of a Chinese poet reading aloud his first completed poem in four years. "Three words and the world erupts," he added significantly.

"It would be a sell-out not to do something new and in fact do what has always been there. Tyrannosaurus Rex was originally electric anyway. It was a five-piece Byrds-type band with Steve Took on drums. Yes, real drums! But I didn't have the discipline to hold it together. People should get their history right, when people say, 'Go back to what you were.' There isn't time for me to go back. The years are going by, you know. I basically wanted successful records or books and make life a little more exciting, rather than bum along in dedicated obscurity."

T.Rex now sport a regular drummer, Bill Legend. "He's lovely, exactly what I wanted. Before I had to play everything, and there was just a patter of bongos behind me. Now if I stop, there is still a noise going on!

"I haven't played the old albums for a long time, but I did recently, AND I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THE WORDS. AND I USED TO DENY THAT TOTALLY."

Marc compared the furore that surrounds his electrification with that which besieged Bob Dylan in the mid-'60s.

"When Dylan came here singing 'The Times They Are a-Changin',' he had already recorded 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'. He'd been playing like that for a year. And Bob Dylan

MELODY MAKER | JUNE 26, 1971

"ONCE he was fair and had stars in his hair" is the dismal chorus of the woeful cherubs who write in child-like hand of the magical change which has o'er taken their fairy king.

For Marc has changed by night, from a chirruping child of light and fantasy, into a gilt and gingerbread rock star. And in the process, threatens to evolve into a clanking electric warrior.

A typical letter comes to the *MM* from reader Martin Appleby of Highgate, London.

"John Peel's ecstatic summer of Tyrannosaurus Rex has come to an end. An ultra-cool autumn bears T.Rex. After *Beard Of Stars* they were effectively disbanded. Gone were the mellow tones of "Strange Orchestras", the weird tales and sounds we loved. Whoever would have thought Marc would transform into a Hendrix-style

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

used to play in a band backing Bobby Vee! Simon & Garfunkel used to be Tom & Jerry and hit with a teenybop tune. I think serious, intellectual Paul Simon was Tom.

"It's all lovely. People will insist on pigeon-holing you. All I've done is loosen up a bit. The early stuff was great, but we were getting stale – that's all. I could see it going on the same forever more. "

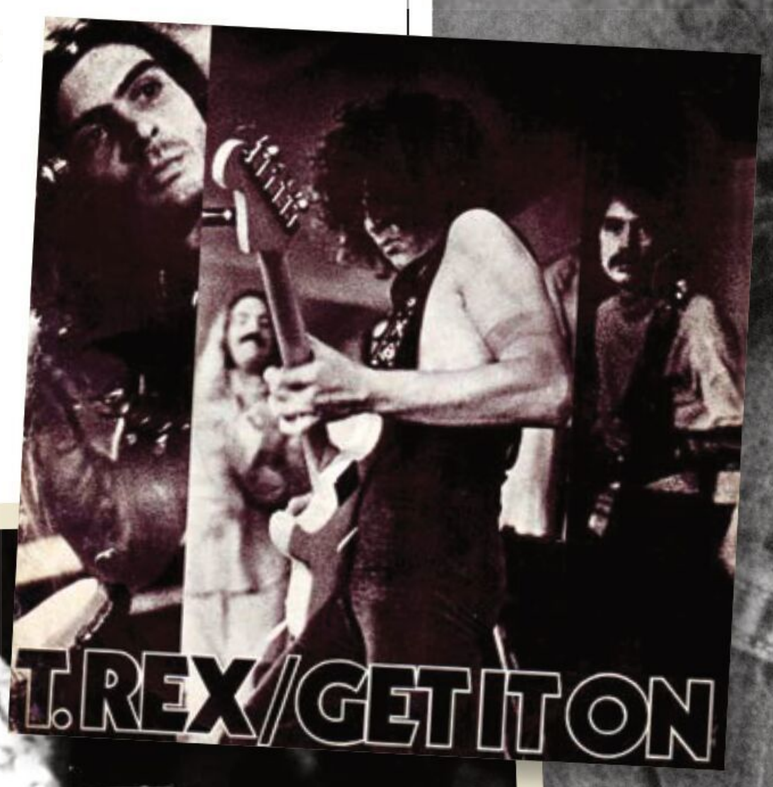
Marc made a further startling revelation about fellow "traitor" Dylan's career.

"On Dylan's '65 tour he recorded four tracks with Eric Clapton and Hughie Flint, which surprised me when I heard it. He was into electric rock even then. I don't know what became of the tapes. Probably John Mayall has them. They weren't that hot, I don't suppose, but it shows what was happening.

"My new album [*out in September*] is called *Electric Warrior* and it crystallises what I am doing now. This is 'our' album – the one people will remember. And if some don't like it, then it won't trouble me at all. They should go and listen to somebody else and get off my back."

Marc played me some of the tracks, including the new single "Get It On," which is obviously another hit, the amazing "Rip Off", and the incredible 'I'm Crazy About Your Breasts' ["*Raw Ramp*"].

Two ex-Turtles and Zappa men, Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan, add vocals which are straight "doobie-doo-wahs"



Live at the Weeley Festival, August 28,1971

GARRY CLARKE/GETTY IMAGES

from the days of "Duke of Earl". Ian McDonald of Crimson is on tenor sax.

With Bill Legend's solid drumming and Marc's enjoyable pastiche of guitar sounds, the new Bolan has the audacity of pop tradition and the tongue-in-cheek joy of Bolanerama that perhaps some of his more starry-eyed followers have never noticed.

The Marc Bolan of T.Rex is still twinkling with energy and humour. So take heart, those fans who have retired behind their toadstools, smile, and do the boogie – not the bop.

CHRIS WELCH

NME AUGUST 7, 1971

CUT into any self-respecting rock'n'roller's head and you would discover a cinemascopic spread of rock image and memories jostling for expressions.

It's a kind of data bank, a source of reference whether through the subconscious or otherwise. Surgery to the brain of Marc Bolan could produce some vivid images... Bo Diddley bebopping in a forest glade with '50s Elvis, Phil Spector and Brian Wilson orchestrating *Lord Of The Rings*, Chuck Berry riding along in his cosmic-powered Thunderbird...

Bolan's roots are far-reaching, and thoroughly

Bolan in '71: "I was never trying to be obscure"

researched. Both "Hot Love", with its echoes of "At The Hop" – unintentional as they may have been – and the current "Get It On", shades of Chuck Berry and the rawness of recording that invokes memories of the old Sun studios, evidently draw their source of power from the very back of the rock'n'rolling Bolan's head.

What proves the point more conclusively is the forthcoming T.Rex *Electric Warrior* album. Here, Bolan has so cunningly utilised a panorama of influences – as wide-ranging as his record collection, stretching through early Presley to his score or so of official and unofficial Hendrix albums – that anyone who has travelled a similar path will find his head spinning from one nostalgia to the next.

On "Monolith" you might be listening to a '71 remake of "Duke of Earl." "Cosmic Dancer" has strings which could have been scored by Bert Berns. "Jeepster" might have been cut in San Phillips' midget Sun studios, and nearer home the jamming "Lean Woman Blues" could be an unused Bob Dylan tape from *Bringing It All Back Home*. That's taking it right down to basics of course. On top of that Bolan has added a spicy icing and a cultured producer's ear to produce a finished product very much '71, and very much his own.

"What I'm trying to do," says Marc as we listen to the tapes, "is incorporate music that turns me on, and basically what turns me on is what turns on the average rock'n'roller.

"'Hot Love', for instance... It wasn't based on any song, but the treatment I gave that was very much a 12-bar boogie, with the guitar very like a lot of the things Scotty Moore used to play on the early Elvis records. I had that memory.

"ALL I'VE DONE IS LOOSEN UP A BIT. THE EARLY STUFF WAS GREAT, BUT WE WERE GETTING STALE"
MARC BOLAN

"'Get It On' is obviously very Chuck Berry influenced. But the only thing that is decidedly Chuck Berry is the little guitar link at the end where I needed to make it boogie.

"'Jeepster', which is my favourite track on the album, was very positively meant to sound like a Sun record. The ending does. It sounds like 'Mystery Train'."

He broke off to play the Elvis album that proved the point.

"Yet it doesn't sound the same. You have the memory of it in your head but when you play it it usually comes out different. The feel remains though – and obviously Scotty Moore influenced me incredibly in my head. I mean I couldn't play the guitar then, but I can remember always turning up the knob on the gramophone as the record faded out so I could make the guitar seem to last longer."

Marc sees a parallel with the recordings of John Lennon. "I always remember 'Quarter To Three' by [*Gary*] US Bonds as being an amazing sound. Then I heard 'Instant Karma' and 'Power To The People', and it is in fact that same basic sound. Obviously Lennon had listened to it and as soon as I heard those records I knew just how he got that basic sound. He again has used sounds of the period in a modern setting."

With "Monolith", then, did Marc set out to recreate "Duke Of Earl"?

"No, not recreate. First you have to realise that 'Duke Of Earl', 'Runaround Sue', 'Please Mr Postman'... those songs, and others, are all the same chords. In fact they're all the same song. What I wanted was that basic feel. When I was telling Howard and Mark how I wanted the vocals they knew instinctively what I wanted. I said I want it 'shooby dooby doo wha wah'... and they both said, 'Yeah, you mean 'Duke of Earl'. The song is not in fact 'Duke Of Earl' but it could be any of those songs.

"The main thing with that song is the lyrics, because the lyrics are not anything to do with that period. To put them against that kind of backdrop was an idea that just made me smile."

It might seem then that Marc has come full circle from teenage rock'n'roll fan to adult rock'n'roller, but Bolan himself sees it differently. Even in the days of *My Children Were Fair...*, and *Unicorn*, he maintains, rock was his main source of influence, and he points to Berry influences in the lyrics of the first album and the results of a Brian Wilson/Phil Spector phase he was going through on the latter.

"I was never at any time trying to be obscure musically," he says. "I was never into a big Eastern thing. I mean, I listened to eastern music like many people did, but I was never into sitting on the floor with my sitar... because I never had one.

"When we were doing *Unicorn* I was going through my Phil Spector period. I became very aware of using five or six tracked instruments because I listened to a lot of the Spector things until I knew exactly what he did. Just for a jive we actually created a Spector sound... We never put it out.

"Once you have worked out how he did it, it is very easy to achieve that sound. There is certain formulas... echo on all the voices, loud tambourine, double-track everything, echo the drums... and there you have it, a Spector sound. 'She Was Born To Be My Unicorn' had a very Spector-ish drum sound.

"Now I always double-track acoustic guitars, and that is a hangover from that period. Handclaps too I always use... like on 'Hot Love'. It is very easy to work out how they did it. But you get very bored with all these things until you get a sound of your own."

Electric Warrior is certainly a major achievement in Bolan's career, both as performer and producer. Seven of the 11 tracks are American recordings, cut either in New York or at Wally Heider's Los Angeles studios, the rest of the recordings being made in London. Marc hasn't lost any of the basic rawness of the American tracks by the additions at various points of Tony Visconti's string arrangements and contributions from other musicians like Ian McDonald's saxes and Rick Wakeman's organ.

"I am very aware," says Marc, "that for the kids who bought the singles this is the first album. And if you bought a single, I don't see how you could be disappointed with it. On the other hand, I don't personally see how anyone who has a head at all who liked us in the past could not like it." ✪ *NICK LOGAN*

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE

ELECTRIC WARRIOR

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 24, 1971

Bang a gong! Bolan's sixth album completes his metamorphosis from elfin minstrel to glitter-eyed cosmic superstar. Yet even as he reached pop's summit, he was looking over his shoulder. BY PAUL MOODY

BY April 1971, the pieces in Marc Bolan's personal jigsaw were finally falling into place. The phenomenal success of "Hot Love" – it topped the charts for six weeks on release in February – had finally elevated him to pin-up status, and with The Beatles receding into history's rearview mirror it was becoming clear that the new decade demanded a new kind of star.

With a bearded Paul McCartney in self-imposed exile in the Scottish Highlands and John Lennon more interested in US politics than pop, the precocious 23-year-old was only too happy to fill the void, as two pivotal performances of the song on *Top Of The Pops* proved. In the second, dressed in a silver lamé jacket and with glitter daubed beneath each eye – hastily applied by his new PA, Chelita Secunda – Bolan's androgynous style spoke to a new generation of pop fans, tired of beard-stroking 'serious' musicians and desperate for visual stimulation after the studio excesses of the late '60s.

The album that followed, *Electric Warrior*, would secure his place in pop folklore. Recorded over six weeks between March and June 1971, it laughed in the face of prog rock pretension. Instead, Bolan's primal three-chord boogies offered a shameless throwback to effervescent '50s rock'n'roll – as much fuel to Bolan as it would be to Elton John and Roxy Music. Its two hits, "Get It On" and "Jeepster", owed substantial debts to Chuck Berry's "Little Queenie" and Howlin' Wolf's "You'll Be Mine" respectively.

Bolan brought the influences screeching up to date. Trading his trademark Tolkien-esque whimsy for a turbo-charged lyricism, his new work compressed his love of Americana into a new vocabulary. In "Get It On" a girl is "*built like a car*" with "*a hubcap diamond star halo*". The euphoric rush of the singles, meanwhile, came contrasted with an existential depth that revealed itself elsewhere in the album. Downtempo ballads like "Monolith" and "Planet Queen" showed his expanded range. "Cosmic Dancer" seemed designed to be the theme tune to his biopic, while the eerie ballad "Girl" – visually fine but mentally dyin'– was ostensibly a cautionary tale to himself in the guise of a scenester portrait.

Tony Visconti's symphonic wall-of-sound production provided the songs with the sonic equivalent of an airbrush – streamlining and buffing the finish for mass appeal. Elsewhere, the sense of T.Rex ushering in a new visual age for music was accentuated by a sleeve by designers du jour Hipgnosis. It featured the corkscrew-haired Bolan seemingly radiating electricity – equal parts thrilling and dangerous. That such alchemy had been conjured up in sessions crowbarred into a packed touring and promotional schedule only made it more remarkable.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"With the aid of producer Tony Visconti he is developing an amazing studio sound with its roots in the '50s. It's not exactly rock'n'roll, but New York juvenile delinquency, hub-cap stealing rumble music."
CHRIS WELCH, MELODY MAKER, SEPTEMBER 25, 1971

"Bolan hasn't missed a trick in production and arrangement... But I began to feel towards the end that the diligent pursuit after the quintessence of rock'n'roll had robbed a lot of the songs of their initial funk."
NICK LOGAN, NME, SEPTEMBER 25, 1971

Having demoed three tracks (the percussive gem "Mambo Sun", "Cosmic Dancer" and "Girl") at Trident Studios in London in March with Visconti, Bolan arrived in New York on April 6 determined to capitalise on his new-found success. Bolan and Visconti toasted their partnership over a meal at Visconti's family home in Brooklyn – Visconti's mother Josephine making Bolan a chocolate cake with the words "Hot Love" written on the top in sliced almonds.

The pair then set to work. In Los Angeles for a two-night stint at the Whisky A Go Go the following week, T.Rex entered Wally Heider's studio in Hollywood to work on three more new songs – "Get It On", "Planet Queen" and "Monolith". Back in New York, Bolan spent a contrasting few days in the city: trawling the seedy amusements of 42nd Street and also seeing Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti speak about transforming consciousness. Musically he was eager to emulate the spontaneous feel of Sam Phillips' early Sun recordings with Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis. When he arrived at Media Sound Studios four days later he told Visconti, "Just go in and mic everything live, and we'll play."
After two major hits and with the adrenalin of a US tour coursing through

ELECTRIC WARRIOR

TRACKMARKS

1. Mambo Sun ★★★
2. Cosmic Dancer ★★★★★
3. Jeepster ★★★
4. Monolith ★★★
5. Lean Woman Blues ★★★
6. Get It On ★★★★★
7. Planet Queen ★★★
8. Girl ★★★
9. The Motivator ★★★
10. Life's A Gas ★★★★
11. Rip Off ★★

Label: Fly
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Trident, London; Advision, London; Wally Heider, LA; Media Sound, NYC
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar), Mickey Finn (congas, bongos, vocals), Steve Currie (bass), Bill Legend (drums), Howard Kaylan, Mark Volman (backing vocals), Rick Wakeman (keyboards), Ian McDonald (saxophone), Burt Collins (flugelhorn)
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 32

BOLAN AND VISCONTI BEGAN SIFTING THROUGH THE SONGS, ADDING A FUSILLADE OF EFFECTS

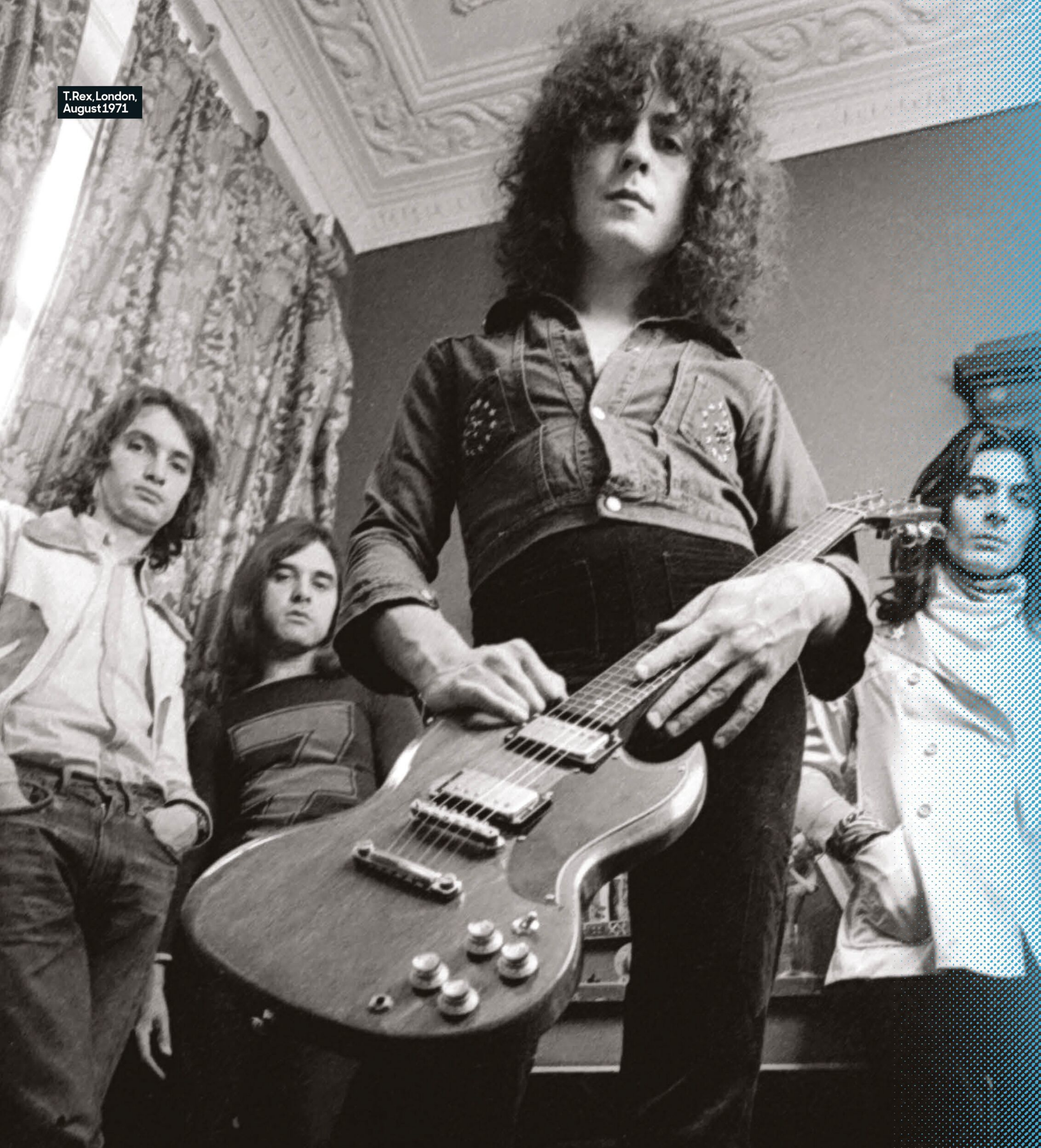
them, morale on the production was high, and the recording seemed blessed. When Bolan stamped his Cuban heels on the studio floor to mark the intro of "Jeepster", it created a ricochet effect that only added to the song's primal rhythm. By the end of the session, the backing tracks for glam stomp "Lean Woman Blues", "Girl" and "Jeepster" were all in the can. His stars coming into alignment, Bolan had the universe reclining in his hair.

After a mayhem-filled UK tour confirmed Bolan's status as pop messiah – the scenes of mass hysteria were dubbed "T.Rextasy" by the band's canny publicist BP Fallon – Bolan and Visconti began sifting through the songs they'd recorded, adding a fusillade of effects: tape flanging, reverb, backwards guitars and phasing. While the T.Rex team still thought they were simply recording a brace of singles, a unified vision helped to turn the recordings into the magnum opus of glam rock.

T.Rex had assembled an album with the cohesion of Bolan's earlier work, but with the whimsy amplified into a monstrous pop. In the album's second-half highs like "Get It On" (burnished, after a chance encounter on Oxford Street, and for the princely sum of nine pounds, with keyboard touches from Rick Wakeman) gave way to the exquisitely arranged trumpets of "Girl", and to the existential boogie "Life's A Gas". The album closes with a jarring tune that plays like a cautionary tale. Written in LA, "Rip Off" was a brutal rejection of the pop life he'd signed up to, musically pre-dating punk even while glam was still in its infancy.

In hindsight, "Rip Off"'s disillusioned tone ("*I'm the creature in disguise...*") feels strangely prophetic. *Electric Warrior* went straight to No 1 on release in September 1971, staying there over Christmas and becoming the biggest-selling album of the year. But the dark intimations of free jazz, feedback and cellos at the end of "Rip Off" seemed to warn of trouble ahead. With Marc having reignited the teenage market, a host of imitators – Slade, The Sweet, Gary Glitter – now flocked to serve it, and in 1972 all arrived to try and claim his glam rock throne.

One artist, however (already known to Bolan as a fellow Visconti client), seemed to pose a greater threat than all three combined. His music was making an innovative fusion of theatricality and intellectual clout, all about to coalesce in a concept album about an androgynous bisexual alien rock star, which he called Ziggy Stardust. ✪



T. Rex, London, August 1971

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

"THE REVOLUTION HAS COME. IT IS HERE"

As **MARC BOLAN** and band round off a year of phenomenal success, young crowds run riot on the band's winter tour. "Marc gives the kids strength," says tour compere Bob Harris, and Marc does not disagree about their considerable power. "Better that it be me than Shane Fenton," Marc informs **NICK LOGAN**. "Surely it is funkier for you to interview me, someone who has something to say?"

MELODY MAKER | NOVEMBER 20, 1971

Melody Maker
BAEZ AND MELANIE COMING
MARC BOLAN
PAUL

IT'S doubtful whether T.Rex will ever play Wigan again. One thing's for sure: if the manager of the ABC theatre has any say in it, Marc Bolan can cross the town off any future date list. Really.

The fact is, there was a slight altercation at the ABC, Wigan, last Wednesday. Some 400 young kids, mostly girls, were moved by the spirit, got up out of their seats, and headed for the stage, where T.Rex were well into "Thunderwing". Two chief inspectors, half a dozen cops and several policewomen looked on as the balustrade encircling the orchestra pit cracked under the combined weight of young pressing bodies trying to get a hold of one or both of Bolan's lime-green Anello & Davide girls' shoes while his feet were still inside them. But look out, kids, the manager's coming!

The manager has sleek blond hair and a florid face that is getting hotter under the collar with every passing minute. He's new to this theatre and he can't bear the thought of a single red-upholstered tip-up chair being ruined. So the house lights go up, the music peters out. The manager goes on stage and tells the audience that unless they resume their seats the show can't go on. Listen, he's got to be joking!

Bolan, guitar slung round his shoulder, draws himself up inside his gold-threaded coat with the red lapels and buttons and looks fit to bust. He calls the very reluctant manager back on stage. "We've played 15 concerts on this tour so far and not one

chair has even been touched," he yells at him over the microphone. "I'm telling you, man, I don't know if we even should go on!"

There's a perceptible sob from the chicks out front.

Manager: "There's a likelihood that people will be maimed if this concert goes on and the people remain there."

Shrieks of derision.

Bolan: [*addressing the audience*] "You're not going to do any damage to this theatre, are you?"

Kids: "Noooo!"

Young lungs at bursting point. Pretty convincing sound. So of course the show goes on, and sure the kids stay exactly where they were. Which all goes to prove that off-screen drama does occur at Wigan cinemas. And not only that – it shows that Marc Bolan and T.Rex have taken a startling grip on young British rock fans.

T.REX completed last week a 17-date tour of Britain, at the end of which the band, but more particularly Bolan, have shown signs of being that fabled commodity: A Successor To The Beatles. This may seem like overstatement but the evidence, both on paper and from personal experience, is strong. Believe me: I went to some of the gigs.

In business terms, T.Rex's three singles this year – "Ride A White Swan", "Hot Love" and "Get It On", have outsold all the singles of The Who and Hendrix put together, and the band has grossed 3.5 per cent of the whole British record market in sales. If the figures are not extraordinary enough, the events of the tour may raise a few eyebrows. In the space of a month fans put out of action no less than 11 cars in which the band travelled. Without exception they stripped the vehicles of everything that could be taken away as a souvenir: windscreen wipers, mirrors, door handles – all went.

Getting away from concert halls involves running a gauntlet of hands that pull at the body like young piranha fish. The cars are not just means of transport; they're getaway vehicles. The roadies are not just there to lug equipment; they're bodyguards. Police guard the hotels where the group stays. The general atmosphere of excitement engendered among the audience is comparable to that created by the Stones and the Beatles in their early days.

"AT SOME PLACES IT'S TAKEN US ONE-AND-A-HALF HOURS TO GET 'EM AWAY FROM THE GIG"

TONY SMITH

NO-ONE recognises that more than The Beatles themselves. John Lennon in a 'Scene And Heard' interview a fortnight ago, and Paul McCartney in this week's *Melody Maker*, both see in T.Rex as their own successors in the creation of audience mania. Ringo told me six months ago that he thought the band was "fantastic" and "one of his favourites", while comparative 'outsiders' on the tour were fascinated by the phenomenon.

Tony Smith, one of the biggest rock promoters in the country, has been in business for the past nine years and has handled most of the major tours in this period, including those of The Beatles and Stones. He promoted this last T.Rex tour and says it's the story of the Stones and Beatles all over again. "It's been amazing from the point of view of audiences. Marc speaks to a whole new generation of young kids, whose average age seems to be about 15, if not younger. To my way of thinking, the reaction has been equal to that of the Stones in the very old days, right from the beginning of the tour. At some places it's taken us one-and-a-half hours to get 'em away from the gig. We literally couldn't find a way out."

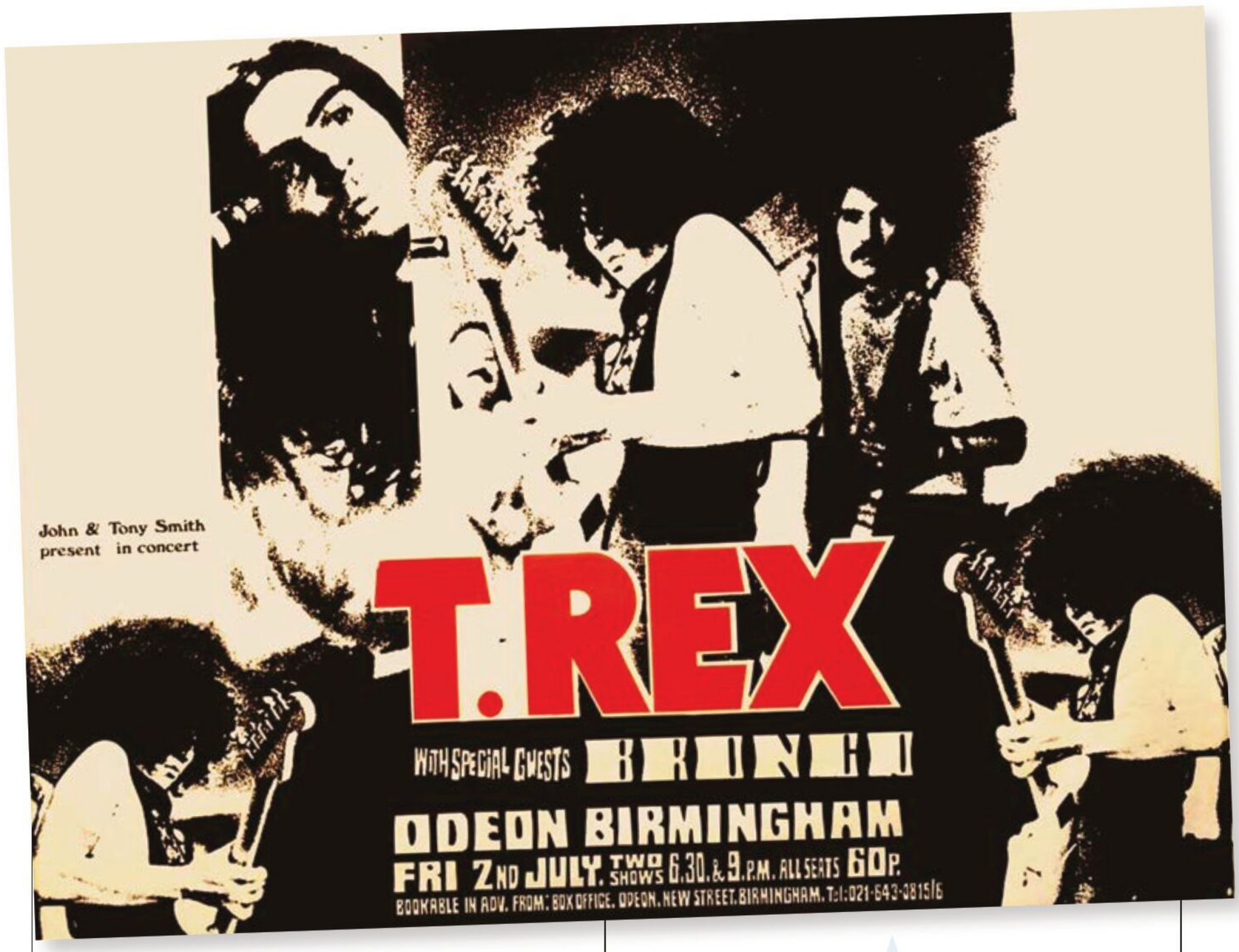
No-one has been more bemused by T.Rex's reception than the disc jockey Bob Harris, who compered the tour. A friend for the past five years of Bolan, he also deejayed on the band's other tour of Britain this year. The audience awareness was growing then, he says, but he still seems shaken by the mobbing that has accompanied this one. The explanation? Marc, he says, is to the kids of today what the Beatles were to those in '64 – the projection of all their own fantasies.

"He's very beautiful, a very beautiful man, and his songs are tremendously communicative to young people. They represent not a polarisation but a drawing together of sympathetic ideas. No-one has captured the spirit of these times like Marc has. I think Marc and T.Rex have got to be the next Beatles, if they're not already."

That the comparison should be generally made with The Beatles and not the Stones is interesting, and one I think valid. What we are really discussing is images, and T.Rex don't carry that reputation for sex trips and adolescent rebellion which the Stones flaunted right from the onset. They don't represent decadence in any way. Their appeal is sympathetic and non-aggressive. They're cute in the way The Beatles were when they emerged, and as Harris says, The Beatles were not only a fantasy but also the guys-next-

Cosmic couch: with Mickey Finn in London, 1971

ARALDO DI CROLLALANZA/SHUTTERSTOCK



door: "They were the living proof that we were important, that being 15- and 16-year-olds meant something, and Marc gives the kids that strength, that 'there is someone like me'."

This sense of identification is conveyed very strongly through Bolan. Bolan, the guitarist and leader of the band, is also its personification. Standing at not much more than five foot, he looks, with his tousled hair, soft features and delicate mouth, like the 19th-century illustrator's idea of a changeling; a character from *The Ingoldsby Legends* or *The Water Babies*, maybe, if that's not too ludicrous a comparison for a 1970s rock star. Certainly, he both looks and seems to feel very young and nearer the age of his audience than his own 24 years. This explains a good deal. His audiences, which appear to be composed of girls aged from 11 to 16 mainly – and on average a year or so younger than were those for the Stones and Beatles – can relate very acutely to someone who looks very much like them.

Bolan himself thinks he is bisexual in appearance, and he accentuates the feminine aspect by such devices as the shoes and the use of glitter around his eyes, while offstage he wears a fur coat, albeit ripped, of his wife's mother. His Fellini-esque features, indeed, gave rise to a curious little incident after the group's performance in Wigan. Relaxing in the foyer of the hotel, where the members of the group were talking amiably to two policemen, on duty in case of trouble from fans, one of the cops suddenly turned to him and remarked that he recognised his face from *Top Of The Pops*, because of "the stuff around yer eyes".

"I bet you thought, 'He's a right poof', didn't you?" smiled Bolan sardonically. "The words I was thinking of were much stronger than that," replied the cop. He was only half laughing.

Talking to Marc later, he asked me if I could envisage the scene in that policeman's home when T.Rex appeared on television: "You know, the guy getting more and more uptight as he watches television, while his daughter is going through an erotic experience and really being turned on." He was amused at the idea. He's well aware that his attitudes freak people

"I THINK MARC AND T.REX HAVE GOT TO BE THE NEXT BEATLES, IF THEY'RE NOT ALREADY"

BOB HARRIS

out. He tells another story, of how he recently went to London's Speakeasy and three or four chicks came up to his table and said, "Bolan, you're a fag."

Yes, he agreed, and had they got any little brothers at home? He gives a look of mock horror in imitation of their expressions.

OVERT sexuality, however, is not a strong facet of Bolan's appeal. In this respect T.Rex are unlike The Beatles, whose corporate image was breezily sexual as well as lovable. But then, social awareness has changed in eight years and it's extremely doubtful if the exact likes of Beatle-mania will be seen again for a decade or so. Moreover, the rock scene has diversified in that time. When The Beatles first hit with "Love Me Do" there was no demarcation line between pop and what was soon to be called rock. The music scene operates now on at least two levels, and T.Rex are on the outer fringes of pop. Whether they, too, can embrace all tastes is another question.

Musically, Bolan has moved within two years from a cultist, though profitable (£500 a gig), stance as the better half of Tyrannosaurus Rex, playing acoustic music in front of elitist audiences, to a set-up within T.Rex where the music is heavily amplified and the devotees are hung up more on the group's personality rather than what it is trying to say.

Some original fans, consequently, have cried that he's sold out. To this accusation his friends and admirers reply that his six years in the music industry have constituted a process of leading up to what he is doing now: turning people on to a certain state of mind and lifestyle. They say that since electrification his songs have hardly changed at all; that if the public turns off tomorrow Marc will not change.

THAT T.Rex flourish on Bolan's appeal rather than the group's musical equation is undeniable. Although their singles, made with American producer Tony Visconti, fit all the requirements of good 45s (ie, they are economical, catchy and eminently danceable) their live performances reveal them as musically naïve. Mickey Finn's congas are frequently lost in the mix, and the rhythm section of Bill Legend (from the Southend band Legend) on drums and Steve Currie on bass is often too inflexible, although Currie has the potential to develop into an excellent rock bassist. Bolan's guitar playing, furthermore, while arresting and inventive in some solos, as often as not tends to the derivative; it comes off like Clapton-Hendrix pastiche.

Yes, it's limited, and yes, the riffs do sometimes seem to go on ad infinitum, but none of the groups that emerged in '63 and '64 showed great musical innovation either. I think that most people over the age of 24 will be unable to comprehend the relative hysteria that T.Rex concerts have evolved into. The rock cycle has come round again and teenagers have once more found a music and, just as importantly, a group with which they can identify.

The resultant group/audience relationship bears comparison with Beatlemania, allowing for the generally increased sophistication in attitudes since those days. There isn't the mindless frenzy that accompanied those early Mersey tours because the group and the audience are much closer together. But that's not to say it couldn't develop on those lines if one accepts that it's all just beginning for T.Rex.

Marc Bolan has his hands on the reins and knows exactly where he is going in this situation. Although Mickey Finn, who replaced Steve Peregrin Took after the latter left, gets a percentage of the take, Currie and Legend are paid salaries. Bolan is indisputably boss, and for the first time in his life he is living the role of the rock'n'roll star. Although he can't drive he has recently bought second-hand a white Rolls-Royce for £2,000, which will stand in the garage of his Little Venice house with the AC sports car. He would learn to drive, he says, but he loses concentration.

Charming and 'natural' in conversation, he is nevertheless an astonishingly self-assured young man. With total conviction he told me one night that he considers himself a cross between Dylan and Lennon; not in musical styles but in terms of his own artistic importance. He has met both Dylan and Lennon. "Neither of them are better than me," he said, "and they know it. They know where I'm at. I'm different, like them. I've always known I was different, right from the moment I was born."

There is about him this sense of destiny. When he was 13 and a half his picture was taken by Don McCullin for *Town* magazine and he became known as the first mod. His picture, showing him with ultra-short hair and a sharp little box suit, still circulates in several music paper offices. For a time he was boy actor on television's *Five O'Clock Club*.

He got his first break in the pop business when someone sent the acetate of "Hippy Gumbo" to Peel, who played it once and got 4,000 requests for the record (although in fact it only sold about five copies, he says). His first book of poems and stories, *Warlock Of Love*, has sold 20,000 copies, while the poet Brian Patten's work tops the poetry charts with 2,000 sales.

All these achievements, he believes, have been forms of preparation for making him what he is today. He is a curious mixture of materialism and otherworldliness. In the same breath he will refer to record sales and his conviction that the Greek god Pan still exists on Earth. He talks of the spiritual levels of existence and of how he practised black magic for two years. Much of it is contained in his writing.

It would all seem mere feyness if he didn't communicate his beliefs so convincingly. He tells the rather chilling story of how he lay in bed one night with his wife June staring at a picture of a tyrannosaurus on the bedroom wall. As he looked it seemed to him that the picture began to take positive shape and to move: "I was afraid, but I knew it was me that was doing it: that my imagination had brought it to life. I also knew afterwards that if I hadn't turned my mind off it would've destroyed me. The tyrannosaurus would've eaten me and there would've been blood on the bed. I could feel it, and so could June. Since then I've been strong. I believe that nothing can hurt me."

This, and other stories, could be ascribed to a febrile imagination. But he doesn't smoke; at one period in his life, however, he was seen by two psychiatrists, who informed him they couldn't understand him at all. They were, says Bolan, totally freaked out by him.

Before every performance on the last tour the members of the group and several others of the entourage held hands in a circle, while Bolan hummed a single note. This hum they all took up until it built to a crescendo. The object was to symbolise unity and to get a lift of energy. Bob Harris, always one of the circle, says that he invariably felt uplifted after each occasion.

In effect, Bolan has reversed the pattern of the wealthy pop star turning to some sort of spiritual life as a mental and emotional outlet once riches having come his way. After having had "more managers than I can remember" he is only too well aware of the need for a good business head. Although he has always kept a firm grip on his own financial interests, two months ago he brought in as his new manager Tony Secunda, former manager of the Moodies and The Move and a man who likes to think of himself as "a gunslinger shooting faster than the next man". Mr Secunda, you can take it, is well known as a shrewd businessman.

Marc says he has signed no contracts, however. No matter. These are heady days for all concerned with T.Rex. For once, the times really do seem to be a-changing.

NME | NOVEMBER 13, 1971

ONCE upon a time there was a little monster all of a half dozen rejected singles and four moderately received albums high. Across the land the little monster loped spryly with a song for whoever would listen, a little sad but not dejected that few spared him their time, until one day the tiny beastie discovered destiny and the magic power of electricity and proceeded to grow and grow, lumbering devastatingly out of its Notting Hill lair to wreak its mighty will upon the nation. "*Get It On*" roared the monster, swelling like a mountain, "*bang a gong... Hot love, ooh-ooh-ee*".

I mean, it's really approaching a phenomenon how, in the space of 12 months, the former Tyrannosaurus Rex, darlings of cross-legged highbrow floor-squatters, has escaped its minority-interest pigeon hole and ballooned into the colossus T.Rex, conquering the airwaves and setting the nation's teenage hearts a-flutter in a manner long thought dead and gone.

And if that piece of whimsy fails to impress upon you the extent of T.Rex's domination, here are the facts 'n' figures to supply the substance: from last December to this, the four T.Rex singles have occupied placings in the *NME* Chart for 42 weeks out of 52.

It doesn't seem so long ago that Marc Bolan and I were sitting in his Notting Hill attic – "Penthouse, please," he interrupts – with the Tyrannosaurus Rex leader despairing over the "intellectual barrier" the public and media appeared to have erected against his band, allowing their records far short of the unprejudiced hearing he felt they deserved. And here we are, some good few months later, in the front room of the Bolan's Little Venice house surrounded by a dazzling array of lighting, sound and camera equipment property of ATV, who are filming our interview for a television documentary. With a touch of irony, a nice case of the mountain coming to Mohammed's front room.

That's some transformation of status, I note, as we sit in front of the cameras and lights, solaced by June Bolan's home-made red wine and trying hard to ignore the army of black polo-necks weaving around us.

"We had a period when we didn't get played on the radio, basically because the music wasn't conventional enough," Bolan rejoined, after a smile at my comparison. "What happened was that, after doing the Tyrannosaurus Rex thing for two-and-a-half years, things were slowing down. I wasn't getting bored, I just wasn't happy with the response to the music. I decided to clear my head and get down to playing electric. I shortened the name to T.Rex too, and the whole thing had a nice fresh feel to it. There were obviously hundreds of people out there who had never heard of us. We did '...White Swan', then we did a TV show and that was it. From then it has been a very strange year for us. The strangest thing is that we started the year as a minority band and have become, at the end of it, the biggest media band."

And the intellectual barrier? That obviously went somewhere along the way.

"I hope so, because you write for people. You don't write for intellectual reviewers. Basically, at the beginning, I wrote for myself. But the emotions began gradually to come through more and more, where they were possibly screened off before. Music is such a personal thing. It just gets my rocks off. It has been a groovy year and the next will be even more interesting."

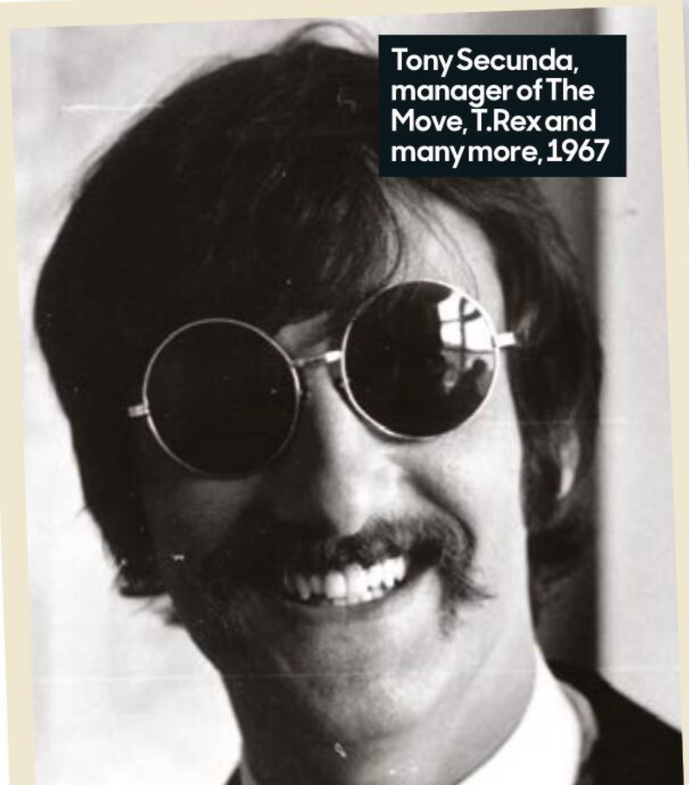
In many ways, though, the really phenomenal part of the T.Rex phenomenon didn't become apparent until the band went on the tour of Britain that finished last month: that is, the band's elevation to a 'teen idol' status reminiscent of the mid-'60s peak of fan idolatry.

"You mean like Cliff Bolan?" smiled Marc, adjusting his cross-legged position on the settee to concur with the producer's demands. "It has been an exciting year, and I suppose the tour was the capper. For a long time kids have wanted to boogie at concerts. I know that, because that's what I wanted to do. The mood of the country has been right for it. I certainly dig those kinds of concerts.

"We did get all that Beatlemania stuff, I accept that, but I was really just being myself and I would rather it was happening to me than some plastic Ricky Steele. It's surely nice that people warm to you in that way, and in my own way I have integrity. We don't have any cigar-smoking dudes behind us. It is down to me what happens, and I find that exciting and stimulating.

"Lots of funky things happened on the tour, cars being smashed up. And a lot of frightening things. We were in Newcastle stuck in a car with kids banging on the roof. You could see it caving in and it was a bit frightening, but then these five little faces came over the top and they all looked like me. They all had Marc Bolan T-shirts and

"I WASN'T GETTING BORED, I JUST WASN'T HAPPY WITH THE RESPONSE TO THE MUSIC"
MARC BOLAN


Tony Secunda, manager of The Move, T.Rex and many more, 1967

MICHAEL STROUD/GETTY IMAGES

"Is it not nice for people to care for you?": Marc Bolan in London, June 1971

corkscrew hair. It was really weird, but it was nice that they were getting involved in a way. We found out afterwards there were hairdressers doing the Marc Bolan cut."

The camera whirs into silence. Technical hitch.

"Can you come in on that again?" requests polo-neck of Marc.

"One of the nicest things I really flashed on," Marc is telling me later in the kitchen when we get a break from the filming, "is people like Lennon, McCartney and Ringo saying nice things about us. I am not assuming we are the new Beatles, but if we were totally lame they might be uptight."

"I think there is a new phase beginning. Because the revolution has come, it is here. Like five years ago the whole T.Rex thing would not have happened without an entourage of show business people behind us. We didn't have any of that. The next record we put out will be on our own label."

Back on camera, after Marc had again gone through several changes of posture to satisfy the continuity department, I asked if he felt he had now turned his back on old Tyrannosaurus Rex followers, or if they had turned their backs on him.

"I have never had any evidence apart from a few letters in the music press, and if you look at them they all come from the same handful of people. The progressive thing was decided on album-selling qualities and ...*Warrior* has been in the charts for three months. Taking your audience seriously... that, for me, was what the underground was all about, and that I still do. People talk about how I move about on stage, but it is very hard to wiggle when you are sitting on the floor.

"IT HAS BEEN A GROOVY YEAR AND THE NEXT WILL BE EVEN MORE INTERESTING"
MARC BOLAN

"Then again, someone came up on tour and said why don't you do stuff like *Beard Of Stars* any more? Well *Beard Of Stars* was primarily electric. On another occasion some little guy of around nine came up and asked why we didn't play acoustic. That night I had done a 40-minute acoustic spot. The changes in the music have been so gradual.

"I mean, Elton John is a good example of somebody who has had to put up with that sort of jive. It is very easy for people to rip you to pieces. There seems to be a group of people like that, a little group who look around for someone to knock. I remember reading an interview where Rod Stewart said that if 'Maggie May' was big he wanted to avoid that knocking. Four weeks later he had exactly the same thing. It was his turn then, and they backed off me for a few months."

With sound recording over now and the crew using film only, and between requests to turn first this way and then that way a little more, I ask Bolan how he reacted to the side of the new-found T.Rex appreciation that has seen his face spread across a thousand teenage girls' bedroom walls.

He goes silent for a minute.

"Is it not nice for people to care for you? Do you not think so?"

And after further reflection: "I don't know. The most unexpected thing was the sexual overtones that have gone down. But isn't it nice that someone can be concerned enough to put you on their walls? I mean, in my music room upstairs I have pictures of Lennon and Hendrix and Salvador Dalí. Better that it be me than Shane Fenton. Surely it is funkier for you to interview me, someone who has something to say."

"It is really down to credibility. Dylan suddenly made The Beatles seem more important. He gave them respect for themselves. I always had that, and because I had that, and basically because of the history of the band, it has made me a credible person. I really think people were pleased that we made it."

Filming over, we flee from the chaos to Marc's music room, where I'm played a tape Bolan has just acquired of him making a demo at 15 – strongly influenced by Dylan but the T.Rex feel was well developed even then – and then brought up to date with a play through of the four new tracks under consideration for the band's next single. "After seven years of trying to do something," muses Bolan, "having actually done it is a very strange feeling." ✪ *NICK LOGAN*

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/GETTY IMAGES

"THE THING HAS GROWN MUCH BIGGER THAN ANY OF US EVER THOUGHT"

An epic audience with a very big star. Now acquainted with both Beatles ("sad" Lennon and "lost" McCartney, as well as adored Ringo) and Stones ("We have great talks, Mick and me…"), **MARC** reflects on life at the top of the tree. Ultimately, with self-certified sales of 18 million in the last year, he considers overthinking things is probably misplaced. "If a guitar sound or a lotta bass drum doesn't turn you on," he tells **CHRIS WELCH** and **MICHAEL WATTS**, "there isn't much point in listening anyway…"

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS

Stacks of charisma: Bolan and T.Rex at the Empire Pool, Wembley, March 18, 1972

18+

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MELODY MAKER | APRIL 29, 1972

"GOOD morning!" called out a small figure in a satin smock striding across the pavement from his chauffeur-driven limousine. A knot of bystanders craned their necks and a film crew held their breath. Would someone walk into the shot for the second time that morning?

Marc's car had already been forced around the block once, when a battered estate vehicle tried to back into the bay outside his office, reserved by the harassed film men.

The estate was mine, being driven in a semi-hysterical state after two hours battling through traffic jams. "I want that bleeding space," I cursed savagely. Just then I noticed the curly head of Marc Bolan peeping somewhat bewildered from the rear window of the limo, waiting patiently to make a grand entrance for the cameras.

Accelerating smartly out of the way, one wondered if the midday interview had been blown. Returning to the scene on foot, Marc had successfully navigated the block once more, and it was possible to capture on film for the future delight of colonial TV viewers, the sight of energetic Mr B starting a day in the life of.

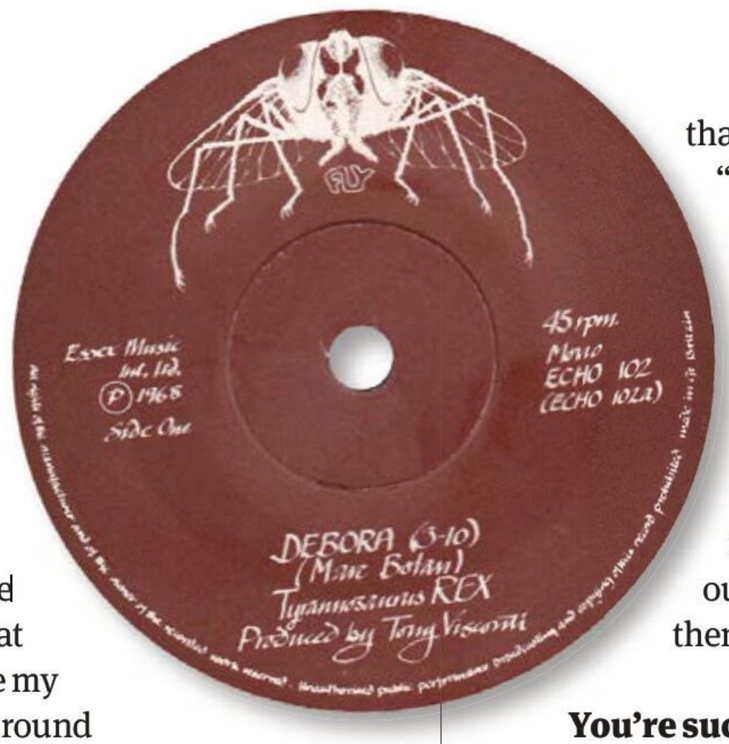
The Central Office of Information were making the film, to be screened in Korea, Canada, New Zealand – all over, man. Marc decided the best way to get an atmosphere was to invite *MM* reporters to carry out interviews. Marc was in sparkling form, parrying thrusts, and imparting the latest T.Rex news with a ready quip. He was quite unflustered by the dazzle of lights, milling technicians, shuffling journalists, and endless 'phone calls.

"I hear..." began Michael Watts fixing Marc with a piercing gaze. The 'phone rang again, and it was Ringo on the blower, checking out his protégé. Or he could just have been passing the time of day. At any rate, it sounded like a cordial exchange of views between the heads of two great nations.

"How's 'Boogaloo' doing?" asked Marc courteously. A faint mumble from the other end indicated it was doing all right.

Just what were Ringo and Marc up to – film wise?

We can't talk too much about the movie yet. It started out with Ringo's film at Wembley but Ringo fell out with the director. So should we shoot one or not? What I wanted to do is write my own scenes centred around a fantasy, so we went on location and shot it. We've done little bits – it's incredibly loose and so funny. It's like visual songs. Ringo still doesn't know what I've done yet, but he likes that.



What recording have you been working on?

We've been recording in LA – New York was too cold. There's no title for the new LP yet, but it's all finished bar strings on a couple of tracks. "Metal Guru" is the single, and it won't be a boogaloo this time. All the tracks on the album are about six minutes long – it's a much more music album. "Telegram Sam" is out in the States now – with a bullet. I love that bullet! The single was done in three studios, in France, Denmark and Los Angeles. I can't record in England for tax reasons and partly because of timing. You know, I haven't played for a month and a half, and it really brings me down when I'm not playing. So I'm going to do some dates here in June. I wasn't going to do any, but I'll do three. Actually I'm still feeling slightly stunned by everything.

What's your reaction to Fly Records' release of "Debora"?

I'd like to make the point that it's nothing to do with me. They're obviously gonna keep putting those records out, so I've been told. Of course they are. They've got a lot of product. They've got five other ones that we probably know the titles of, which would be potential biggies now.

But Fly say it's impossible to release them without your permission?

I know. Legally, that's what they told me. Legally that's true. Meanwhile, I think "Debora" is at No 5 now. In five records' time I'd probably injunct them. But I just don't wanna do all that, scrapping. That's the last thing the kids need. We'll squash them with the new one in five minutes. I just wish I had it ready sooner so I could put it out the second week and squash them altogether.

You're such a good businessman, from all appearances. Do you think of yourself in that sense?

I am sometimes. I'm very erratic, though. You've got to have your shit together, haven't you? Else you end up like – and they won't mind me saying this – Howard and Mark [*Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman, former members of The Mothers and The Turtles*]. They must have made 10 million dollars for White Whale, and then they settled for their tapes back.

You went through a rip-off period, though, didn't you?

Oh, I've been ripped off by everyone! My saving grace was that all my contracts ran out six months ago, so I could negotiate deals when we were super-hot. I could do one on them. But had that not happened I'd be in bad shape now. Really. I'll get practically nothing from "Debora".

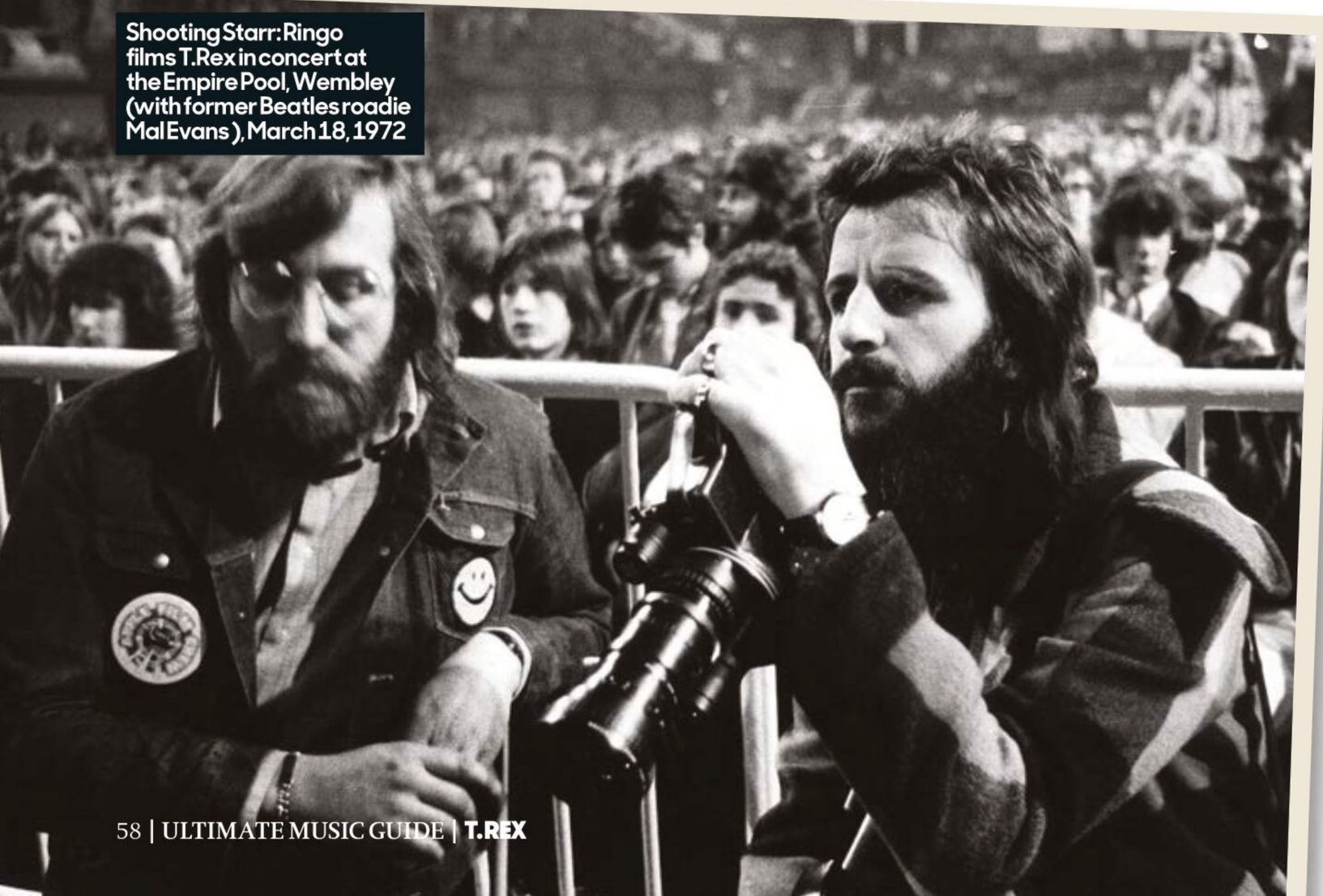
The position now is that you manage yourself, right?

For the moment. I'm still looking for an overseer. I mean, this [*indicating his office*] is still very new. What happened is that we moved away from Tony [*Secunda, who until recently was handling his business affairs*] and this office came up the day we left. So we just moved in to have a phone number, really. I've been away since then. I've only been back four days, so we're slowly getting it together.

You must have had a vast number of people badgering you. How do you find the right one?

I haven't spoken to a person. I haven't been available, to be honest. I'm not sure who or what I want yet, but I simply don't wanna do it. It's a hard one, 'cause there are no managers, I don't believe. They'll all write in and disagree with me but there aren't any. If there was a manager I'm sure Hendrix wouldn't be dead today. You either need someone to look after you and love you and keep you together, or you have your heavy, nameless, fat New York businessman, whom we all know, right? And that's an impersonal thing, but it can be very good. I don't down that, if you wanna work like that, but I want somewhere in the middle.

I know what I wanna do artistically, but I'm not prepared to sit all day with merchandising people. I've had to do it and it freaks me out. I look very together when I'm doing it, and then I go home and throw a glass at a Salvador Dalí picture. Tony Secunda was right for three months. He was right for making "Get It On" a hit in America, and *Electric Warrior*. And that was that.



Shooting Starr: Ringo films T.Rex in concert at the Empire Pool, Wembley (with former Beatles roadie Mal Evans), March 18, 1972

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The main man: recording tracks for *The Slider* at Rosenberg Studios in Copenhagen, March 1972

You brought him in to negotiate contracts?
I brought in his organisation. He had a very fine accountant, Michael Wesley, who did a lot of the work, and Tony was there to sort out a lotta muck that was laid down, and he was paid handsomely for it. Once that actual thing was done in America we disagreed on so many different things about the future.

How did he see your future?
I never actually asked him, to be honest with you. I just felt uncomfortable. For a band like Enoch's Earwig or something, it probably would've worked, but I've only ever done it the way I believed it, what I could live with, regardless of you saying I'm a businessman. If I was concerned that much with money I could make at this moment on merchandising deals... Well, I've been offered £25,000 just for nothing, a little banner thing. But what they wanted to do, and the way they wanted to do it, is slightly, um... I only trust the people who know me, when I'm put down, to be straight with me. And there's not one person in the business who I've ever worked with who has ever really put me down, 'cause everyone I've ever elbowed, man, it's been for a good reason. And they know it, each single one.

How many managers have you had?
Seven. Most people would have had about 12 in this time. You know, you go through periods. They were all good for a period of time, but when that period of time is gone...

Most bands want to leave their management, but it's just not possible?
With Tony it just ceased to be. There was no argument or anything, no bad scenes. It was just that I wasn't happy any more. I wasn't sleeping well at night the way I always do. I was doing things myself a lot, which I hadn't wanted to do. But... cool.

"I'VE GOT FIVE PEOPLE SUING ME... THERE'S LOTS OF THINGS THAT GO DOWN THAT ARE WORRYING"
MARC BOLAN

Can you carry on coping with all the pressures to maintain the status quo?
No. No. But I can cope with the help of people around me.

How does this pressure emerge? What sort of shapes does it take?
Many. I've got five people suing me at the moment, anonymous suers. There's lots of things that go down that are worrying.

Is the business side the biggest worry for you?
Well, it becomes so. Like, for instance, America now is good for us; we've been offered a lot of money to work there but I can't go for two months, because I don't want to for a start, and because of the movie. But it means I've got to get someone over there to do all my shit for me and I don't have anyone, only Warners. In fact, we should be touring there now – we have a tour booked, but there were too many loose ends here. I had to record the album, which should have been out in May, but which won't be until June now, and there should have been a single three weeks ago which won't be out until May 5 or something – purely because there wasn't time. I mean, there was time, but it was so wasted! For the first time in my life I booked three sessions and couldn't play. I fell asleep in one of them, just collapsed. I didn't have a mental or nervous breakdown, none of that stuff – I just couldn't do it, you know. We hadn't rehearsed the songs and I had to teach them, and I didn't want to do it! It's the first time it's happened to me, I just split immediately. Sat up all night.

Maybe The Beatles, for instance, were at an advantage there, because there were four individual stars and they could relieve the pressure on each other?
They had exactly the same problems. The last five-week tour of America they all came back insane, totally insane. Like, if you've read the Dylan book, the Tony Scaduto one – I read that during our last American trip and I related so much to that amazing tour he talks about, which seemed to go on forever, five months or something, and it said he was clinically insane. The thing which I feel all the time is being pinned against the wall by hundreds of invisible people. All the time. So consequently, you totally retreat. I don't go out, ever, any more. [*Smiles sweetly*] I don't even go to the Speakeasy. It's actually got to the point now where I really can't go out. We went for a drive on Sunday, through Richmond Park and that and it was just ridiculous. It all sounds very camp, but it really was. It was a bit frightening, 'cause every car stopped, all the people stopped. It was very strange, very weird. I wasn't really ready for it after America, just

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

being in hotels and studios all the time, and laying on beaches.

Have you actually had aggro scenes?
No, I never get aggro. I'm pretty butch. Like this guy came up to me at the airport, when I came in, and said, "You Marc Bolan?'" And I say "yeah". He says, "My chick fancies you." So I say, "Well, cool, I'm probably a better lay than you are." And he went, "Oh, can I have your autograph?" It was cool. I cooled him down.

You see, the thing about any success, certainly in the rock'n'roll business, is it gives an incredible amount, but what it takes is irreplaceable. It's like if you take acid it burns out brain cells and they don't regrow. Rock'n'roll is like that. It's killed more people musically and mentally than I've ever see it do before. I'm no longer the same person I was when I made "Debora", man. And I don't mean that in a bolshie way, with people writing into Mailbag. I mean seriously, as a human being. I'm not the same person in the last year that I was before. I'm a better artist, I know that, but...

As a nice person?
Oh, c'mon – I don't know if I was nice in the first place! I mean, I'm a more understanding person, but inwardly there are more wars going on inside now. You see, before there was always the aim of becoming successful. That might be what it is. All the time wanting to do it, and all of a sudden, it's there! And it's much bigger than you expected, and all you wanna do is play guitar. Really. That's what happened to me. And that's what happened to everyone else I've ever spoken to. But then, we're rock'n'rollers, you see, we're no businessmen. It's that you have to be, that you have to learn, 'cause there's so many times you're kicked down, be it on paper or whatever the reason.

And once you've become successful as a rock'n'roll star, what's the motivation, then?
Music, it's the only thing in my life that matters. The only thing. Seriously, very seriously. There's nothing else.

How about friends?
Yeah, but that to me is the same thing. That's all I have to give to friends. We're doing a *Melody Maker*, right? Without the friends I had around me six months ago I'd be in a mental asylum, that's a fact. It's only people around me that have held me together. It's heavy, but that's truth. I've got a lot of good friends, but in terms of why one does anything in a material way it can only be the music. There ain't nothing else makes me do it.

We've all seen certain famous rock stars messed up by the business and its associations. Too many. Too many.

Is the answer to be like Dylan and retire to lead a hermit existence?
In my own small way I've done that, you see. I've retired from what the initial freak is – doing live concerts all the time AND all the rest. Dylan said a lovely thing once. He said he played *Blonde On Blonde* just to see what he was up to at the time, which is very true. It's a great line, 'cause after doing this album it took till the night before last to even actually remember what the songs were – and I was very impressed with it! [*Laughs*] But I don't remember anything at all. I have great mental gaps. Gone, totally gone. I don't remember anything of the last American tour, even. Not a thing. It becomes a big blur. But I don't think that's bad. The one thing I don't wanna do is dwell on anything too long. Growth is all that matters to me, and doing things that are relevant.

"I'M NO LONGER THE SAME PERSON I WAS WHEN I WROTE 'DEBORA', MAN... I MEAN SERIOUSLY"
MARC BOLAN

You mentioned Scaduto's book on Dylan. Have you read Toby Thompson's *Positively Main Street*?
I didn't go past the first intro. It's like 'Gush One' etc, isn't it?

It does a lot to destroy your own particular myth that you build up around him.
Oh, Dylan was the jiver of all time. The Scaduto one is very true. But I adore all that, man. On reading it you felt, 'Hey, just like me.' It's what's not written that's important.

The audience and the artist are much closer together now, you know. People expect to be told what's behind the shimmering image...
We all made it for him. We said, "Here he is!" He said it all, though, you know. The classic line, which justified it all totally for me, was when he was asked, "Who's you favourite singer?" and he said "Peter Lorre", and you listen to *Blonde On Blonde*, man, and to hear Peter Lorre talk it's exactly the same. Dylan didn't say one thing that hadn't a lot of truth in it. The basis of that was very true, 'cause it's the same voice if you listen.

ALTHOUGH you've made it in Britain on the same level as The Beatles, say, the national press has not reacted as fondly. They've been more distrustful than when they were at the peak of their fame. The Beatles were "our boys", that sort of thing...
I'm not that socially acceptable to them, you see. They're not sure if I'm gay or butch. We're sort of stuck in the middle of what The Beatles were and Stones were. On meeting me, what was cool about [*esteemed Fleet Street writer, born 1919*] Donald Zec, when he interviewed me, was that he was very impressed with the fact that I could talk at all! I think he came in to sort of send me up. Definitely. But you know, if you rang on the bell I wouldn't kick you out. I might say, "Hey, man, it's not cool, I'm on the job."

Does adverse publicity bother you at all?
Nothing like that bothers me any more. It used to. The first slagging letter broke my heart. Since then I really don't care. Lately I've not read anything seriously that's been written about me. I've glanced through. I used to read them all, but not any more. I could be really camp, I suppose, and say it would take me too long to go through them all.

Do you foresee a time when you'll be wooed by the Establishment, like The Beatles were? Would you let that happen?
I don't think they'd wanna woo me, to be quite honest, and I'm not sure The Beatles were. They were just sucked into it. It was much more showbiz in those days, and they all appreciate that. Obviously, times have changed.

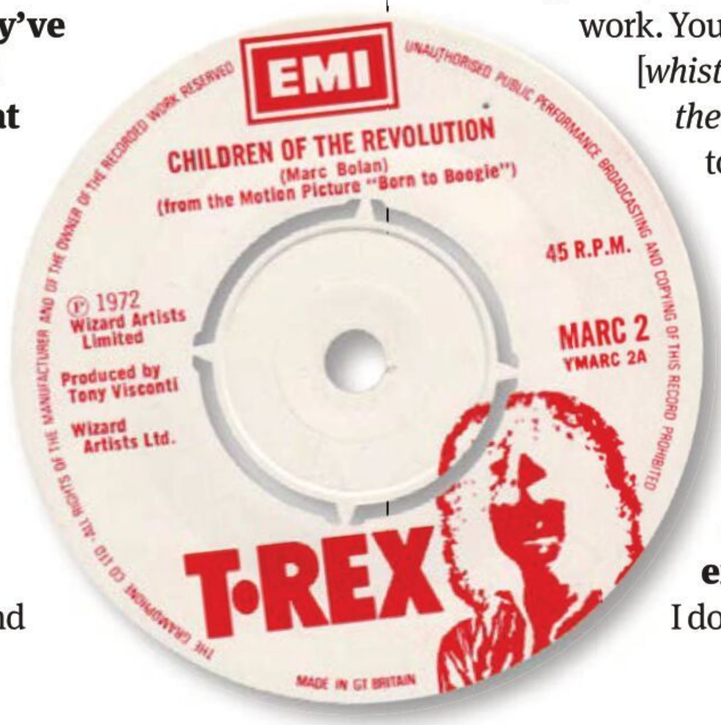
Would you accept an MBE if it was offered to you?
I don't think it would be offered to me. If they gave it to me, I'd accept it, 'cause if someone offers anything to you it's disrespectful and hurtful to turn it down, but I wouldn't cherish it and think any more than I do about other awards. I wouldn't stick it on the wall; I might give it away to someone. Its horse brass, isn't it?

MELODY MAKER | MAY 6, 1972

How is it you and Ringo are so sympathetic to one another?
I don't know. You always get illusions about people in the business, who you think you'll get on with, but you never do – at least, I never do. One gets a great barrier, in fact, with everyone one thinks very similar to. It's always the people I least expect to get close to that I end up friends with. It happens. It's not contrived.

Is it that you're probably expecting too much?
Probably. I'd really like to meet Edwin Cobblers 'cause he's such a groove and he writes really like me, and you get there and there's this cat going, "Hey, man," and all that. It just doesn't work. You both sit there going [*whistles slowly and stares around the room*]. Or you're frightened to play songs 'cause he's gonna stare or somethin'. A lotta that goes on.

Are you conscious of the fact there's a super-elite among pop musicians at a certain level, a sort of exclusive club?
I don't think there is.



"It's only people around me that have held me together": Marc and Mickey Finn in October 1971

Don't you? Not the ex-Beatles, the Stones?
No. No-one that I know knows anyone.

I'm just thinking on the lines that when you were in LA, Jagger came to see you.
Yeah.

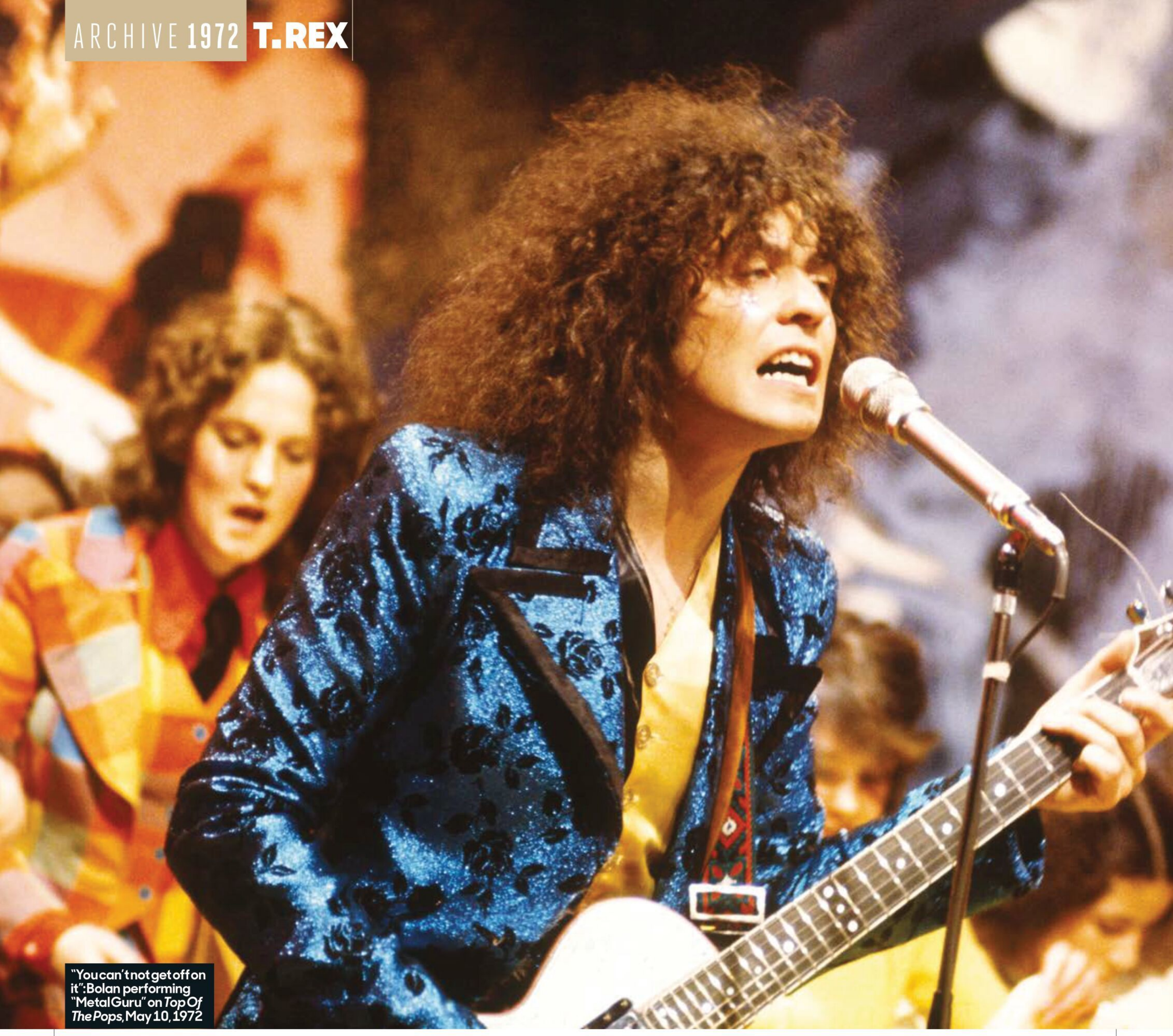
And when you were in New York there was Lennon. Do you get the impression that these people check you out, vet you for membership, so to speak?
This is total journalese now, isn't it? That's not the truth. The truth is, there are so few people, um, visible that one can learn from automatically, so one can only got to the ones that one knows... When I saw Lennon we just got on fine. He's not a close friend of mine or anything, but we just immediately had a nice thing, and I'd make a point always in New York of ringing him. But John Lennon doesn't represent to me what you said, any more than I represent a superstar. I like his chords. And he has a lot I can learn from.

But three years ago, when you were Tyrannosaurus Rex, the likelihood of you two meeting on such a basis was negligible.
Oh, I wouldn't have approached him. And he probably wouldn't have known who I was. He does now because he reads about me or something. And obviously there is a competition artistically. Before, people of that calibre didn't have that many people to worry about when they put a record out. Now they have to consider T.Rex and possibly... I don't know, who else?... There must be someone else.

If John Lennon, or Bob Dylan, or The Rolling Stones, bring out a new record, is one of your first reactions to size up the strength of the new competition?
Sure, I listen to all those things. When they're new I tend to listen to them all, as everyone does, but I don't think of it as inspiration. The first Lennon album, the sound of it, influenced me incredibly – the drum sound. Very much. I heard his new one and I enjoyed it very much, but there's nothing on there that would influence me. I heard "Tumbling Dice" the other day for the first time, and I'm not sure, personally speaking, that they couldn't have put out another track as a single. "Tumbling Dice" doesn't strike me as being the strongest thing. But they still boogie so well. I was very excited for them to hear that that energy is still there, 'cause a lotta people have been saying it isn't.

Survivors of the '60s British rock scene?
They're fragments, aren't they? But I think for them that's a great pain – I might be completely wrong, but they seem very aware of that all the time, that they've been there so long, and also that they're not obviously as big as they were. They're very aware, like Dylan, of not being the spearhead of something, and that's a downer.

Can you ever buy the idea of The Who as the greatest rock'n'roll band going?
I wouldn't put The Who in the same class as the Stones! No way. That's Kit Lambert's idea. The only thing where the Stones have never compared with The Beatles is they could never write as good songs, nowhere near, and that's still a problem with them. It's very hard for them to write. They come up with some great songs sometimes, but it's hard for them. They don't just knock 'em out. It takes ages and ages and ages. It's not the playing, I don't think. They're just not that important any more; I think they're finding it difficult to live with, in the context of 16-year-old kids. That's who they were important to, that's what they were about and that's what Mick still wants.



"You can't not get off on it": Bolan performing "Metal Guru" on *Top Of The Pops*, May 10, 1972

RON HOWARD/REDFERNS

Having heard their new album, it's apparent they were aware of T.Rex, Slade and others.

I know. The beginning of "Tumbling Dice" is a bit like "Get It On". In fact, they played it me and watched my reactions. They watched my face, they watched my feet, they watched it all, which is great. I do that all the time.

It means they're trying. They wanted to find out what I'd do on hearing it, and I do that every time someone walks into a room; I watch what they do all the time. We have great talks, Mick and me, great talks.

But maybe they've left it a little late. I dunno. Not musically, but like who is their audience? You're paying to see a phenomenon, and if it ain't a phenomenon any more... You ain't gonna tell me, for instance, that one can sit through an hour of Paul McCartney and really vibe peak.

No-one can come to a peak on it 'cause it's a bummer, man. You can't hit a concert I'm doing at this point in time and not get off on it, 'cause I'll make 'em! I'm still fighting. But after three years not working I ain't gonna go out there and do a whole number, 'cause I'm not gonna know. You can't go back to it. There's no way it can be redone. Once it's gone, once you lose that train of doing it.

Like, there's 400,000 advance orders on "Metal Guru". I mean it, it's – phenomenal! But if we didn't put a single out for a year it would be different, I guarantee you. It would still be a monster No 1 immediately, and everything, but there'd be something gone.

Like, the Stones' album cost a fortune, man – and now Kinney have gotta get their money back. Their advance was two million dollars, and they were offered much more by RCA. RCA offered them five million dollars or something like that. They ended up with quite a lot, but what I got was not very short, which is something to think about, on one hit in America.

We were offered five million dollars, which is two-and-a-half million quid, by a jive company, but you can't. You can't play these games 'cause it ain't no good. Like, as soon as you got your money, end of story.

CBS offered a fortune, but what do I want with CBS? That's the thing. I just didn't wanna know. I don't like what they do with Dylan – all that about "We're not gonna promote 'New Morning' without ads" really killed that album, stone dead. And putting out "Wigwam" as a single ain't too hip. I mean, hang about! C'mon!

If you're big you can go with anyone and sell records, but you must think of longevity. You've got to think of five years' time. I stayed with EMI purely because they're geared to working with T.Rex. They've done it for a year and a half and they're totally equipped, and they paid what I asked, so it was cool, and I felt obligated artistically. We got the most they ever paid for anyone, I think. It was worth it. We got it back in a day, I think. That whole period was so lucky for me.

I sit here and think I've sold 18 million records in a year and two months. Two records I didn't want out have both been enormous with no promotion from me at all; "Debora" doesn't even get played much. "Metal Guru" is coming out and it'll be a monster. You know, when I saw that movie [*of the Wembley concert*] it was weird, 'cause I felt exactly like what you'd written, but that wasn't me. I was looking at this thing up there. That's to do with me not going out any more. To have every single person look at you and point is very weird, very odd, and it gets so more and more.

I can really sympathise with Ringo. Electric fences and dogs, and all that. I'm beginning to really understand that, which is cool, but you mustn't let the kids see that side 'cause they don't understand. To them you're not real. *Melody Maker* comes out every Thursday, they see the picture, and what do they know? I'm something that lives in a television.

The only saving thing is that I'm slightly like what I'm supposed to be like. Can you imagine not being like it, being a manufactured product, and every time you went out people said, "Oooooh!" [*gives a knowing look*]. Like, Alan Ladd was three foot tall and was always eight-foot in people's minds. At least I wave at people and poke me tongue out. For whatever reason, its history now. It just is, and we can't change it, even if we wanted to.

DO you ever feel a need to justify what you've done?

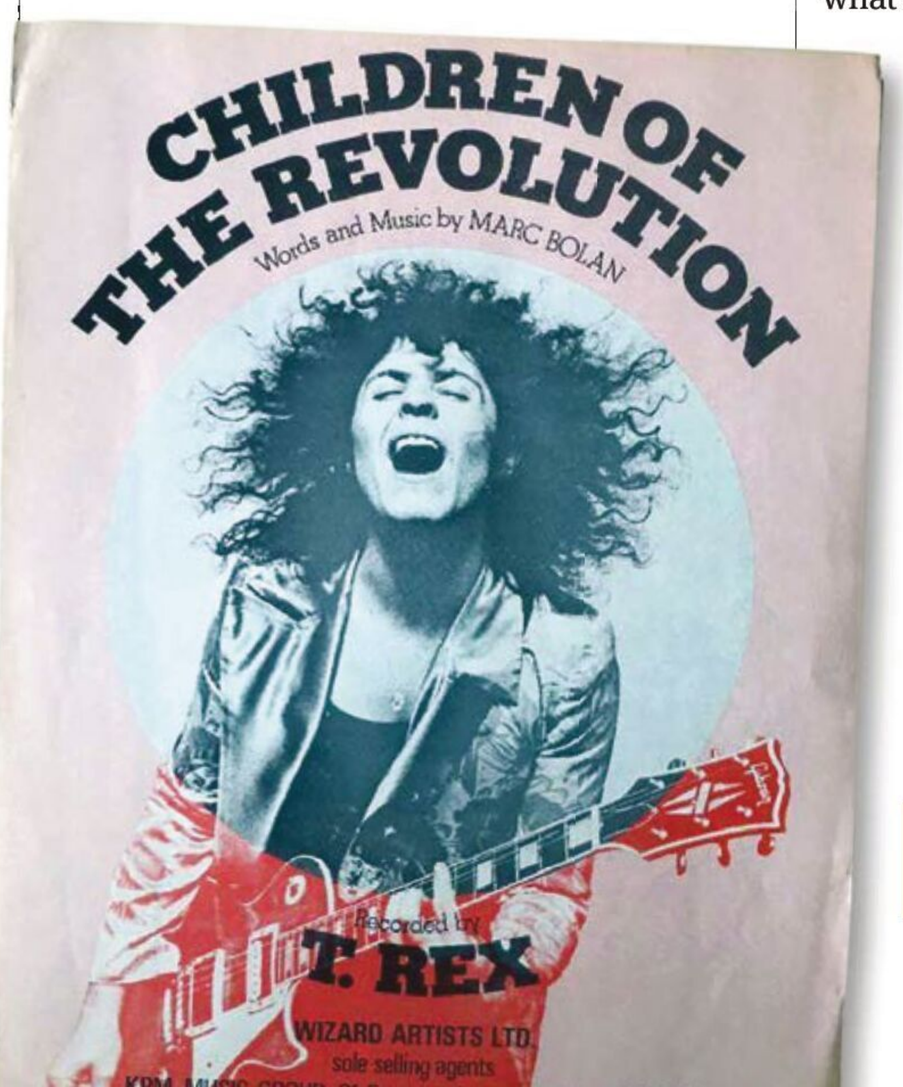
I feel I'm justification enough. That I exist is enough, for me. Any more than that, it gets very de-stable.

Why should you be more successful in Britain at this point than, say, Slade or Black Sabbath, successful as they are?

Um, because we've caught the public's imagination at the right time. We are a band that started out as an LP group, basically, and who always had commercial potential. I was always considered to be slightly literary, slightly mystical if you want, which I am no less – I'm much more perceptive, in fact, than I ever was. Because I don't choose to talk in long stanzas and poetic, flowery prose doesn't mean one's any the less a poet; but I proved my roots by doing that.

And then we were always considered the sort of band that was never really as big as it should've been right at the beginning. I mean, we had a week of being very big right when we first started, but it began over three years to wane. All I did, I think, was fulfil a lot of people's ideas about how maybe we should go by doing exactly what I wanted to do. It's the old story of putting guitar, bass and drums behind everything, not like with Dylan, though. I've heard people say that, but 'cause we grew into it. But without sounding arrogant, I've written some very good songs. I'm a good songwriter. There are better, but there's a lot worse, man, I wanna tell you.

"I WOULDN'T PUT A BAD SONG ON AN ALBUM. I'M NOT SURE I WRITE BAD SONGS, ACTUALLY"
MARC BOLAN



I think everyone who's a good songwriter has peaks of writing special songs. It's never continuous, ever. We all write less special songs. What is exciting, and what makes one stay with an artist, is a pretty consistent standard. I wouldn't put a bad song on an album. I'm not sure I write bad songs, actually; I don't think I ever have. But I've written a lot better than others, by my own evaluation.

It's not you that's changed; it's the public and the environment?

Everything. Yeah. I steered myself in an environment where it would change, didn't I? I put myself on view in the right places and people said, "Hey!" There was a bubble. And then someone comes along and says, "Record that," because pieces of plastic get it out to people who can't be there, and then the machine starts. Or it doesn't, depends where you are. It can be put out and nothing happens. But 95 per cent is 'cause it's bad promotion in that case.

Why would you say The Beatles made it at that particular point in time?

Why did the chicken cross the road? You see? To get to the other side. That's really it, man. They did what they did 'cause they loved it when they started. They were all in skiffle groups. But suddenly, you realise you've got to get a job, and then it becomes something else.

Once you get to this stage it's – hard, man. There ain't no two ways about it. And if you're gonna lame out you'll lame out. Every moment is a choice. The pressure of the whole thing is phenomenal. Like, that thing goes out that I'm supposed to be at Lincoln [*the Great Western Express festival, May 1972*] – nothing to do with me, out of my hands! But I don't know how many thousands of people are going to hear about that, and you don't know what reasons they're going to say for why they thought I hadn't turned up. They might say, "Oh, that Marc Bolan asked for too much money" or "He pulled out", and it's nothing to do with me! I've never even heard of it, right? But that's going on, and now I'll have to think about it and how to deal with it. And there's millions of those. It affects any career. Obviously has to.

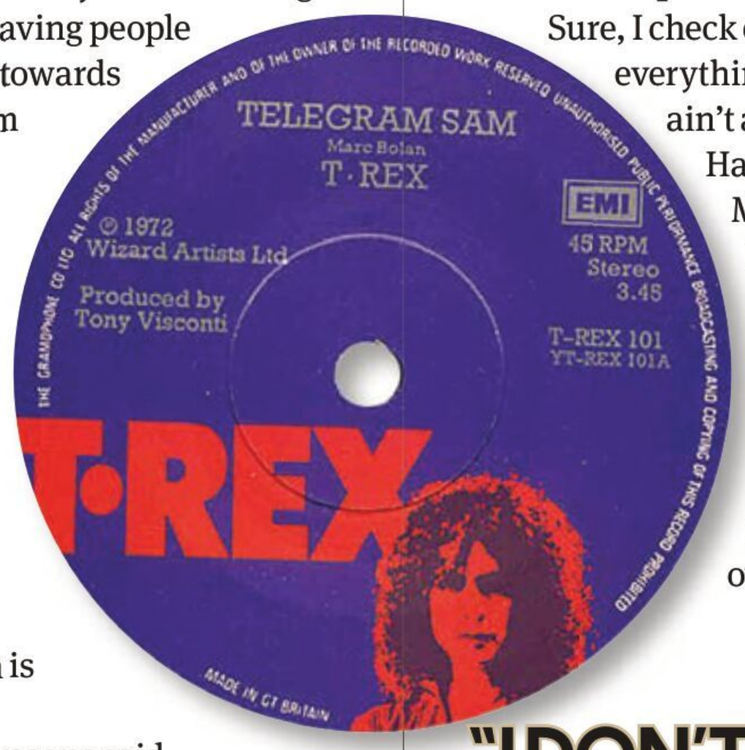
I've worked eight years for what I've got now, but in the end I don't know what it's worth, how I'm gonna come out of the whole thing, and what sort of shape I'm gonna be in. I just know that those things are against the natural way I ever did anything, and the reason I've been successful is I've never screwed anyone.

The gods are strange. They take it away, baby, so fast. With no disrespect to PJ Proby, for example, there's many people you can think of that were very big at one time. And yet he disappeared. Why? The reasons behind it are not what they seem to be. It's a law of balance. Someone points a finger at you and says, "You've got it." Then you get what you wanted, but whatcha gonna do with it? Every day, man, so many people scraping hits out of you, and you're there chopping 'em off.

DO you think the critics are going to embrace you like they did Lennon and McCartney?

I honestly don't care. Like, take the poetry book [*Warlock Of Love*]. That goes out and it's not reviewed in one paper, and it was very successful for a poetry book. Now that makes the guy at *The Times* or one of those things obsolete, man, as far as I'm concerned.

It's like Grand Funk in America. That got ripped off rotten, but one can't deny their success. How one adjusts to that is something else. Had we not had the groundwork of three years of making friends on the papers, having people be slightly sympathetic towards me and knowing that I'm not a creep, it might've been different, 'cause when it happened everyone knew what'd gone down. It'd been since '65, man. But you'll notice with the Wembley reviews not one of 'em actually reviewed the concert. They just said what went down, which is the way it should be.



Critics... you know, someone said to me today, what is "Metal Guru" all about? And I said I don't know. He said, "What's a metal guru?" and I said, well, like a jeepster, actually. So he said, "What's a jeepster?" I said, it's like riding a white swan, and he went 'oh'. He wrote it all down. You see, it's just enough that it is. I can sit down for hours and tell 'em all about it, give people like that guy answers they wanna hear, but it's a waste of breath. For me, it's not abstract. "Metal Guru" in context of that song, is about godhead, I suppose.

"*Metal Guru, is it you? Sitting in your armour-plated chair*". The other line is, "*You're all alone without a telephone*". I mean, God isn't gonna have a telephone. I don't want telephones, so he ain't gonna want one, is he?

It's very hard, because one never knows outwardly how people look at things. I mean, I wasn't the "electric warrior". Electric warrior is a thing out of a story I wrote, an Ice Age warrior. I didn't feel it necessary to explain to people that fact because at some point that story will come out. I mean, what's "Tumbling Dice" all about? Y'know, if a guitar sound or a lotta bass drum doesn't turn you on, there isn't much point in listening anyway. If someone doesn't like what you do it's really tough – they shouldn't listen.

Or just because one is successful that doesn't mean they should necessarily feel inclined to dissect what you do. Donald Peers [*a popular ballad singer of the 1950s*] was very successful in his time, I believe, but that doesn't mean I've got to go out and buy all his records and start dissecting, no downer on him!

Do you, like Lennon, say, use music as a means of putting across some form of message?

I have done on the new album. Every song is a message, but it's very hard for me to describe. And personally, Lennon's thing for me was slightly too political. Rock'n'roll is basically an up; and I like music to think to, obviously, and I don't listen to just anything, but I found it slightly depressing as an album. It would slightly limit the times I would play the record. Rock'n'roll is enough if you pick up a guitar and play it, well, that's enough of a message. There are many tracks on my album that are, shall I say, autobiographical. "Ballrooms Of Mars", that's one track.

Do you ever listen to Slade, Black Sabbath, the Faces, and your other contemporaries?

Sure, I check everyone out. I listen to everything. I know Slade ain't about to be competition. Have you heard the new McCartney? He's lost, man, he's lost. He's no idea what he's gonna do. Ringo I love, because he's fine and he'll never let me down. I only see George occasionally. I don't know much about him. We're not overly attracted to each other, but he seems quite a nice cat. Lennon I get on fine with, but he's sad, just sad. There's a great sadness about him.

"I DON'T THINK I'VE CHANGED SINCE I WAS FOUR. I WAS HIPPER WHEN I CAME OUT, WHEN I WAS BORN"
MARC BOLAN

Do you get the impression that the Faces and Rod Stewart backed off from competing with you?

I'm not aware of them at all, actually. Honestly. I'm aware of Rod 'cause he had a big record. I never saw any competing going down – and I know when someone is competing with me 'cause I get worried, you get a feeling down here, of excitement. I know I never considered that with him, but we might compete for the media. Whoever is behind him was trying hard. Remember that phrase? "We don't wanna put singles out, we only wanna make albums." That seems to be the overall approach. And then suddenly they make singles again a year later when they aren't as big. I like all the Faces very much as people, but I never... Rod's albums are better, obviously, much better than theirs. I've felt that much more in America.

Tell me, what is YOUR real strength in America?

Very new, but very big. We've got a gold single now for "Get It On", and that album is gold this week. "Telegram Sam" came in at 61 the first week. It did 250,000 the first three days. You see, what we haven't done, and I hope the people respect it, is we made no attempt to hype it. I mean, there are so many groups – and I won't mention the names – that I read so much about and are supposed to be big there. That single [*"Get It On"*] got to No 8 in the singles charts after six months, and the album's been in the charts, I think, 40 weeks.

What clinched it in the States for you?

The tour, really, but all the good promotion as well. I wanted to find out what had gone down and the people just weren't aware of what was happening. I went round all the radio stations and said, "How come?" They hadn't really heard "Get It On" there, but slowly it just happened. We never hyped anyone there either, you see. But every concert we played was totally sold out. That last tour was incredible. We did 100,000 in a week on the album after that tour.

The audiences were much less primed there, you see. We'd never been on television. They didn't really know what we looked like. It's growing very fast there for us, because they're very into the commercial thing. They can see what's happened here. I think, if the thing is done correctly, it could be phenomenal there. I just didn't wanna say, "Hey, we're T.Rex making it in America," and all that – 'cause it's been done so many times and I don't think it means anything. If someone doesn't have the intelligence to look at *Billboard* and *Cashbox* and see the placings, well... But in America I let them see all the No 1s here, and keep seeing them, 'til suddenly they couldn't deny it.

Y'know, I keep all the music papers every week, as I'm sure many people do. I've got papers from '62. I've got a great room full of music papers! But I only ever go back on anything months, years, later. I used to refer back to what guitar someone had in the old days – I still do, actually. It's normally pictures. I'm very into pictures, and hand movements, all that sort of jive. I don't do it any more, that's the sad thing.

When I had five years in Tooting, or wherever it was, I didn't have much else to do but drool over Les Pauls. At 9.30 every Wednesday morning I used to go to Tooting Broadway to pick up the music papers and I used to have a coffee. I was very embarrassed about going places – still am, actually. Then I used to go and read 'em on the train home. It was bliss, man. Heavenly bliss. But going to America got me out of the habit.

When "Hot Love" came out we left Britain when it was No 1 and came back when it was No 1. For the first time I began to realise it all goes on without you. I thought we'd go away and be totally, instantly, forgotten, five thousand miles away. We came back and it was exactly the same. I'd always felt that had I not read my music papers it would be all different.

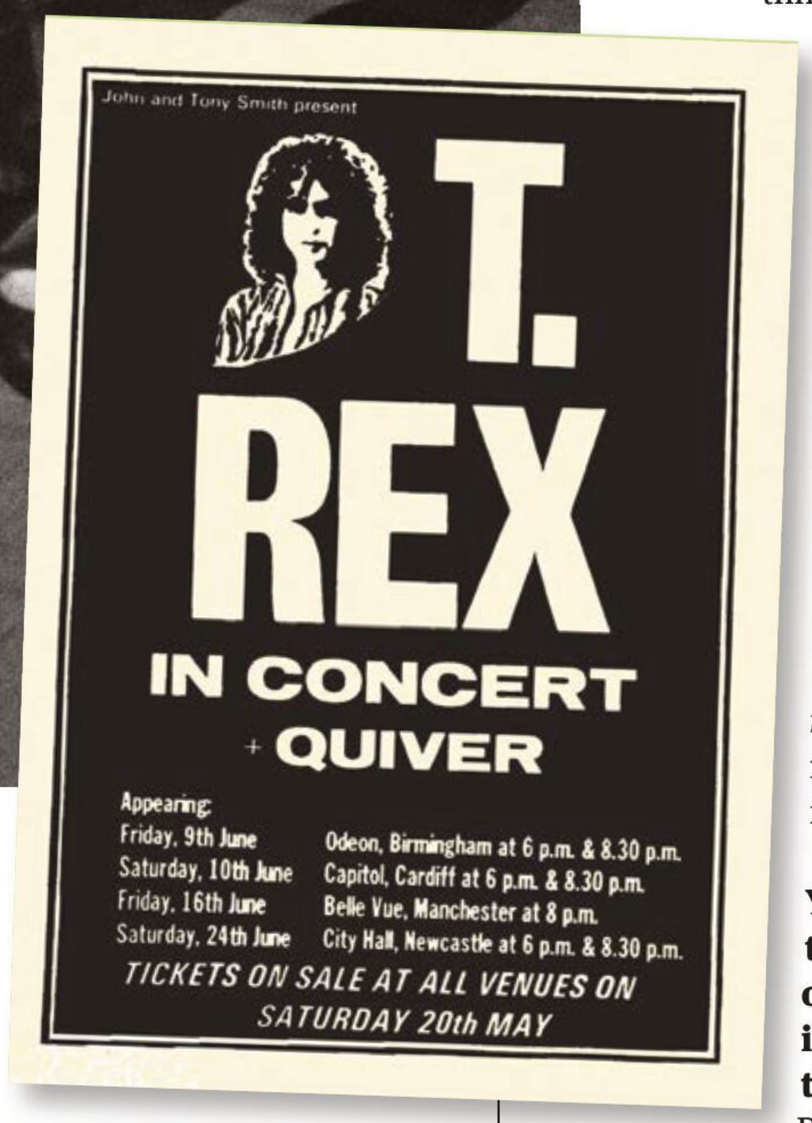
How's your relationship now with John Peel?

Fine. Fine. I see John no less than I see anyone. Most of the people that are my closest friends I haven't seen for months, especially when they're working as well. It's hard to liaise. The last time I saw John was three months ago, and that was fun. I send him a lotta postcards.

There's a feeling that there's some estrangement between the two of you?

My relationship with John was always strange.

With bassist Steve Currie in the background, Bolan soundchecks during T.Rex's four-date British tour, June 1972



We're not really compatible people, although we love each other very much. We have a bond which is unbreakable, basically as we started virtually unknown together and both attained success from nothing. We always had differences of opinion. We're both oversensitive towards each other. I mean, just our taste in records is very different. There are many things. But we've never lied to each other. We've always been very straight.

You see, any time I get off at all now I tend to stay at home on my own, just because I don't want to see people in general, not necessarily John. Normally, the times when you do want to see the people they're not around. Often I've rung John and he's been away. He understands, of course he does. At the beginning John helped me incredibly, and when you see something like this happen... I wouldn't say he feels left out or anything, but the thing has grown much bigger than any of us ever thought. Times have just changed, you know. The thing about John is that he has a great mind and a really good head. He will always surprise everyone, always will.

Have you changed, do you think?

Well, I'm still the same little boy I was. I still get off reading music papers. I still get off on guitars. There's this great block, you see, between the kids and the pop star, which doesn't exist, man, in reality. I don't think I've changed since I was four years old. I think I was hipper when I came out, when I was born, than when I'll go back. You just get sadder. You see more pain and suffering. Life is loving people, screwing people, having affairs with people, seeing old friends, going back to your old home where you used to live, going to school... but you end up disliking yourself most of all, probably.

You're the one that in the end you don't like. Everyone is cool but you. Your deficiencies bug you: the fact that your ears might be a little big and you wanna chop 'em off. As a kid you get into those things. Chicks – all this stuff hangs you up, which is rubbish, but that's the one thing in the end that consumes you, and if you get over that one it becomes a mental thing: the fact that you're too quick with people, or you didn't give someone a chance.

What do you think you will have left behind as an artist and musician?

I'm inclined to think it will be more than people will give me credit for, because I don't think I've actually done my thing yet. It probably won't be music. Writing, I would think, in 10 years' time. All this will be classed as a phenomenon alongside the other phenomenons, as it's being now. I span a lot of spectrums. I'm right in the middle of it all.

I've written some very fine melodies, I think. "Cosmic Dancer" was a very nice melody. I did a string quartet recording just for myself, and it sounded very fine. I was very impressed, much more than I expected to be. And there are many words I've liked on songs. I think people will always pick pieces. They pick the "*newspaper taxis*" and all that stuff. There's a line in "Rip Off": "*I'm a creature in disguise/ There's a man with a whip on his silver hip/Living between my eyes*". I think that's a very relevant line. I very often flash on it.

You think, therefore, that people will pick up on the lyrics and the imagery rather more than the music?

People tend to, yeah. I tend to.

I know that the music business thinks that through you rock'n'roll is boogieing again?

Sure, I think so too. But, y'know, all the music is exactly the same. Everyone thinks the same thing. It just depends how you do it. We're all flesh and blood, supposedly. At least, so the rumour has it.

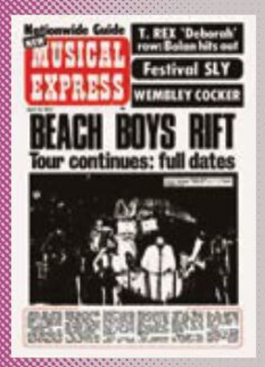
MICHAEL WATTS AND CHRIS WELCH

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"I DON'T PARTICULARLY ENVY BOLAN. IT'S ALL DOWN TO WHAT YOU THINK IS SUCCESS"

FULLY ACOUSTIC EX-REX STEVE PEREGRIN TOOK HAS NO HARD FEELINGS. IS HE THE PETE BEST OF GLITTER ROCK? "WE WERE ALWAYS DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE," HE TELLS JAMES JOHNSON. "THAT'S WHY, FOR A WHILE, IT WORKED SO WELL"

NME APRIL 15, 1972



SINCE he left T.Rex, Steve Took says he's spoken to Marc Bolan just twice. The last time was about three months ago at Boston Gliderdrome, on a night when Rexmania reached a new peak.

After feeling a little out of place all evening, Took went backstage to talk to his former colleague. After a while a journalist came in to ask Bolan a few questions, ending up with how he accounted for the phenomenal success of T.Rex. Before Bolan could speak Took stepped out of the shadows and simply said: "I left."

Since then the two men who formed the original band back in '67 have not met, and Took isn't particularly perturbed. Although he doesn't state it categorically, you feel they no longer have much in common.

On the musical side, Took has moved into a new scene, maybe not as lucrative as Bolan's but one he feels is perhaps a little more genuine, playing his own songs, solo, with just an acoustic guitar.

Between gigs he sits around his small flat, a comfortable but hardly opulent place in London's Ladbroke Grove; like many others in the area, with a waterbed in the corner, a battered stereo, a few sci-fi books and friends coming by regularly.

It's the area where you'd expect him to live. Some would say it's London's most liberated zone – certainly the nearest the capital ever got to Haight Ashbury. Even now, freaks, mystics and hustlers try to live out hippie ideals among the dilapidated houses, general squalor; wrecked cars in the gutters and wrecked people on the streets.

Now Took wants to reflect the whole lifestyle in his songs simply because he is still as deeply involved in it as he was in the days when T.Rex was Tyrannosaurus Rex and the group was, as he puts it, a "flower child, acid group".

Explaining his point about his departure helping the success of T.Rex, he says: "Marc and I were together for three years, during which we recorded three albums and had varying degrees of hits. Yet we only appeared on television twice, once on a John Peel show – surprise, surprise – and once on a six o'clock religious programme. At the time we kind of wondered why we weren't on more often, but now it's quite easy to see. Simply, they didn't particularly like hippies.

"Nowadays people consistently ignore the hippie thing about the group of the early days. Tyrannosaurus Rex was just a completely different concept to what T.Rex is now.

"I guess for a while Marc was a good hippie. Like, we used to sit around and rap about what needed changing. I know he doesn't do that now.

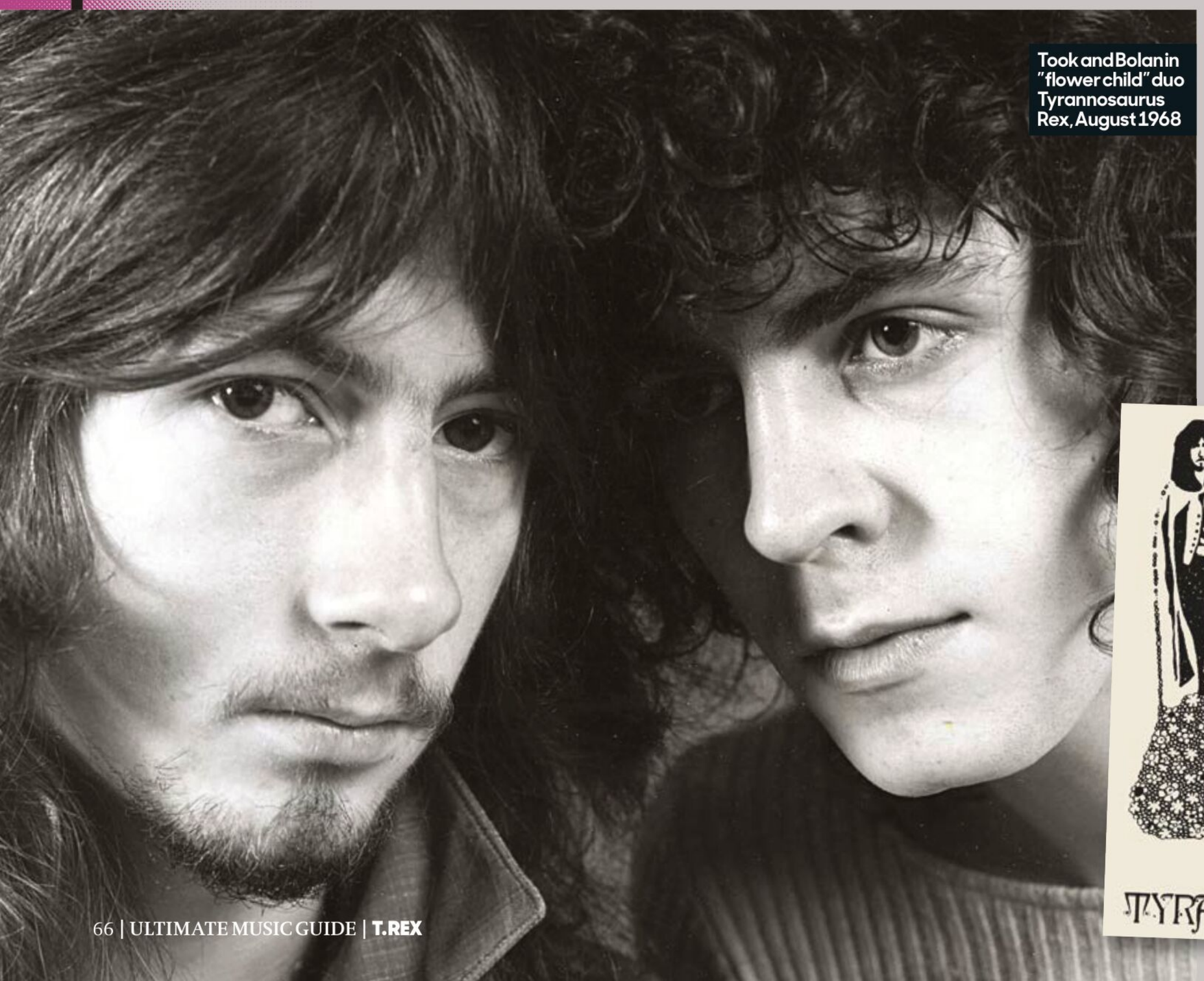
"The trouble is that after you've had two or three hits you find yourself socialising with a different type of person – other people with hits, or managers of groups with hits. While I was still lying around smoking dope, Marc would be out checking these people out. Or instead of him lying around rapping about the history of rock'n'roll or something, he'd be saying what a drag it was there was nowhere to go.

"Of course it's quite easy to lose contact, but I think we were always different types of people. That's why, for a while, it worked so well. It was always a very violent pop thing."

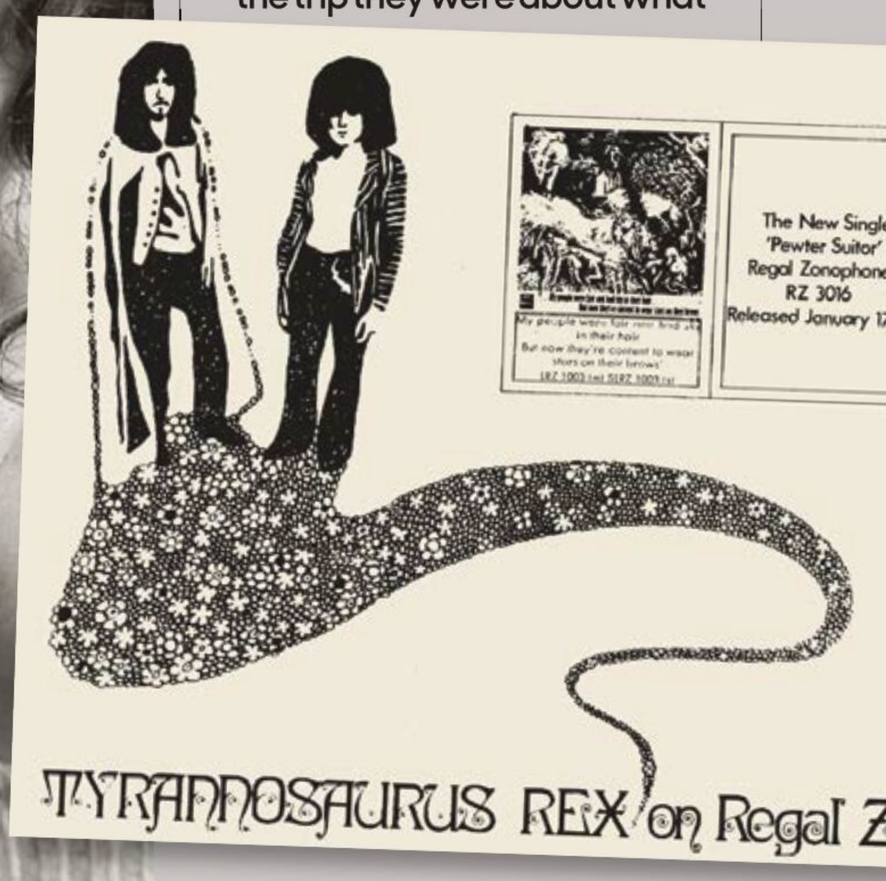
> "I hope he's happy with what he's got... Maybe he could play a few benefits"
> **STEVE TOOK**

But Took doesn't necessarily feel that a clash of personalities was his reason for leaving the group. Rather there were disagreements over musical policy and Took's dislike of the way the group was being managed.

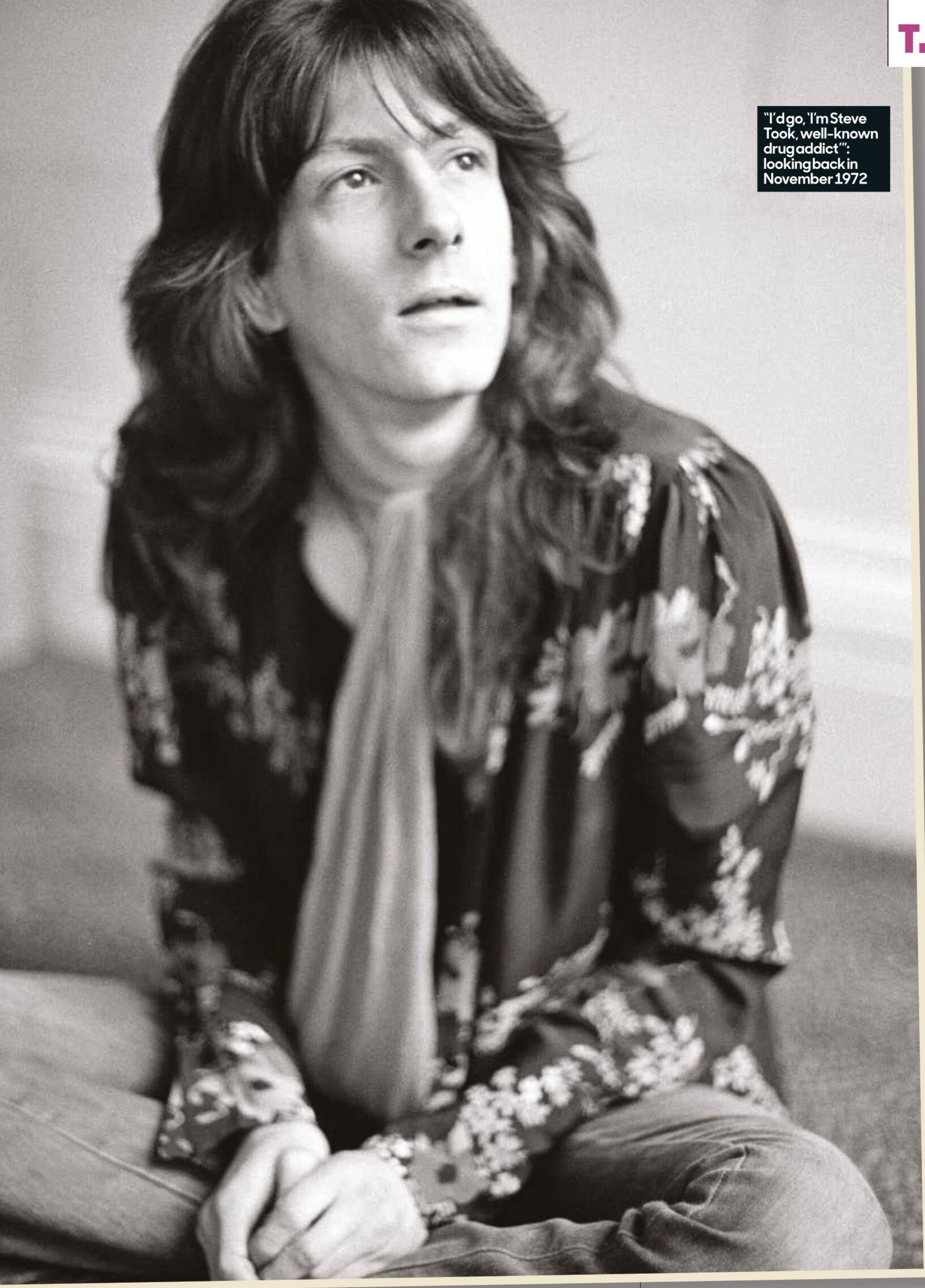
"When we started off, Marc would look after the melody part of a song and I'd be responsible for the percussion and the arrangement. And it worked very well. Then I started writing things of my own, and instead of being on the fantasy part of the trip they were about what



Took and Bolan in "flower child" duo Tyrannosaurus Rex, August 1968



TONY GALE/PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



"I'd go, 'I'm Steve Took, well-known drug addict'": looking back in November 1972

happens to the kids on the street around here. But the record company started objecting to words like 'breast' or 'drugs' and it frustrated me greatly.

"Also I was getting really shat on by the management. A typical thing was when I used to go out and jam occasionally with The Deviants and The Pretty Things. The management would come and say, 'Boy, don't go and jam with this group, it's bad for the image', and I'd go, 'What? What image? I'm Steve Took, well-known drug addict.' Then they'd say, 'Yes, but we don't want to mix with these revolutionaries. We want to get you on television.' But, you see, I didn't particularly want to do six o'clock religious programmes. I mean, what a joke.

"Anyway, meanwhile Marc was sitting at home writing his stuff and I wasn't able to do mine. It's understandable in a way, but he wasn't too keen on it.

"But in fact I saw in the *NME* that Marc said I played ego games at that time. Well, what's that all about? We're all on some kind of ego trip, but what's selling his 8in x 10in photo for 25 pence? If that's not ego, what is?

Took doesn't see as surprising any change in Bolan's character since the early days. After all, he says, he's been through a few changes himself. Success can do that to you, and Took saw quite a bit before he eventually split.

"Like, being mobbed at the Festival Hall. The little girls like you if you're skinny and pretty. That's half the trip, you know. Bob Dylan wouldn't have made it if he was fat. No way."

Nowadays Took's used to being thought of as the guy who used to play with Marc Bolan. He says people seem to like to compare him with dead people – Brian Jones, guys like that. At a recent college gig he was asked if he felt anything akin to Pete Best, once of The Beatles.

But he's not particularly concerned. He didn't know that two weeks ago "Debora" was in the charts again – almost five years after it first came out.

Of the new Bolan sound he says: "I think Marc makes really nice singles and he writes nice three-minute tunes. But when I saw them live there was a lot missing from the singles. It didn't happen for me. They didn't move it. I mean there's boogieing and boogieing. I can boogie on the guitar as well."

As it is, though, Took is more into acoustic things at present. He's playing about four or five gigs a week and trying to get by without a management contract or a record company, in spite of several offers. So what's he writing about now?

"Sex, drugs and violence, I suppose. No, I don't know. Things that people get into around this part of the world, things that happen to kids on the streets.

"Basically, all I want to do is sit under an orange tree, play my guitar in the sun, get stoned and dig the smells and colours. Unfortunately there aren't many orange groves around here and you can't go picking oranges off lamp-posts.

"I don't particularly envy Bolan. It's all down to what you think is success. He's a very ambitious person and perhaps the only thing that's changed is his values. Possessions can get hold of you once you're earning a certain amount of money. I hope he's happy with what he's got. Personally, I just think he could do a lot more.

"I mean, he's got the media now. He's on television every other day. Maybe he could tell people a few things about pollution. Maybe he could tell them that in 50 years there ain't going to be much left. Maybe he could play a few benefits for people.

"But I can't see him doing it. I had a rap with him about it and 'I don't need hippies' is his attitude.

"And let's face it, his audience aren't hippies now anyway. I tried to score in Boston and I just couldn't. Then when I went back to the dressing room there were three policemen being given whisky." ✪

ANTIQUES & COLLECTABLES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

THE SLIDER

RELEASED | JULY 21, 1972

1, 2, babala babala boo boo! Marc Bolan navigates the perilous follow-up album with aplomb, marking the pinnacle of his musical and cultural star power. BY ERIN OSMON

IN approaching *The Slider* Bolan found himself in a strange position – facing the sophomore slump seven albums into his career. Having finally achieved his breakthrough with *Electric Warrior* the previous year, could he now follow up on his huge success and deliver the goods with his dedicated British audience watching? And how would the results be received by 'serious' rock critics?

To judge by the album's opening blast – a joyful yelp of "Muwahaaahaa yeeeaaah!" that wouldn't have been out of place on any Slade record of that year – he was utterly unconcerned on both counts. This sound was "Metal Guru", destined to be his last No 1 single, but which began the new T.Rex album – his first composed, recorded and delivered at the height of Bolanmania – with an utterly triumphant blast. To judge him outwardly, Bolan was completely at ease at the top.

A devotee of '50s and '60s American pop culture, he'd long coveted the fame of his heroes James Dean, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Bob Dylan – and when he channelled their outré swagger it was through the prism of his own mystical balderdash. With the arrival of Bolan's hard-won "T.Rextasy", his own bespoke Beatlemania, and the mounting glam movement he spearheaded, he appeared to be at peace with the height of his star. "It's not serious," he told *Record Mirror* in October of 1971. "I'm serious about the music but I'm not serious about the fantasy. It's no big deal being on TV."

In March of 1972, Bolan loaded Stevie Currie, Bill Legend, Mickey Finn and producer Tony Visconti in the back of a stretch limo, along with a cache of sensory-enhancing substances, and set off for the Château D'Hérouville to prove just how serious he was. Elton John had just recorded his *Honky Chateau* in the 18th-century estate just outside Paris, and had shared news of a UK tax loophole that exempted overseas recordings, making the location that much more enticing.

In the residential studio, the band's performances flowed like their fountain of cognac. By the end of day one, the largely unrehearsed quartet had laid down basic tracks for half the LP. "Marc was going for the vibe," Visconti told Bolan biographer Mark Paytress. "Anything that went over three takes he threw out." Though such a vérité approach was out of vogue in an era of epic studio stays and increasingly micro-managed rock production, Bolan adopted the intimate and imperfect aesthetic favoured by Dylan, the room's energy flowing into the album's grooves.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"It has been an achievement to borrow musically from as many sources as he has and still come up with something instantly recognisable, but now he's just ripping off his own clichés."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, JULY 22, 1972

"All the familiar ingredients are here: loud, raucous rock; softer, more melodic acoustic numbers; mystical lyrics rich in imagery. It's music to listen to, not to analyse."
MICHAEL OLDFIELD, MELODY MAKER, JULY 29, 1972

Bolan sometimes told reporters that *The Slider* was his most personal album, and it could be that the veracity of the recording process allowed him to access some of the truth of what was going on under the surface of his ebullient public persona. Amid his characteristic lyrical free-association, a cosmic sea like a bumble bee and so on, a song like "The Slider" is quite the opposite of what you might expect from a title track by an artist at the peak of their powers.

Over a funereal and minimal boogie, he suggests life at the top may not actually be as good as it seems. "*When I'm sad...*" he says, unexpectedly. Sad, Marc? Really? What happens? "*...I slide*". It's testament to the robust nature of his composition and Visconti's arrangement that the song sounds like a triumph rather than a defeat. As the album continues, a more candid Bolan seems to occasionally emerge. In "Baby Boomerang" he's writing from the point of view of a serious person trying to write his novel but distracted by a companion who only wants to "*play*". He's also "*searching through garbage/Looking for a friend*".

On "Spaceball Ricochet", meanwhile, we find a portrait of the artist confronting the size of his fame and feeling dwarfed by it. "*With my Les Paul I know I'm small/But I enjoy living/Anyway...*" It's not as if Bolan has repositioned himself as a writer

TRACKMARKS

1 Metal Guru ★★★★★
2 Mystic Lady ★★★★
3 Rock On ★★★★★
4 The Slider ★★★★★
5 Baby Boomerang ★★★★★
6 Spaceball Ricochet ★★★★★
7 Buick Mackane ★★★★★
8 Telegram Sam ★★★★★
9 Rabbit Fighter ★★★★★
10 Baby Strange ★★★★★
11 Ballrooms Of Mars ★★★★
12 Chariot Choogle ★★★★
13 Main Man ★★★★★

Label: T.Rex Wax Co
Recorded at: Rosenberg Studios, Copenhagen; Château D'Hérouville, Paris; Elektra Sound Recorders, LA; Trident Studios, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan, Steve Currie, Mickey Finn, Bill Legend, Flo & Eddie (bk vocals), Tony Visconti (string arrangements, bk vocals, production)
Highest chart position: UK 4; US 17

of Cohenesque profundity, but it's not fanciful to suggest he's trying to express a deeper side of himself here. Bolan's compositional style isn't complicated, so it doesn't leave many places to hide. "Mystic Lady" marks the nadir for his whimsy gone sour. "*Pleasant crescent moon fills my heart with pain/Fills my toes with rain...*"

Though Bolan was notoriously image-conscious, *The Slider*'s personal and universal truths pierced through the façade. Its blend of mysticism and vulnerability is deftly conveyed by the album's mysterious cover. The grainy black-and-white image of Bolan and his curls peering from underneath a top hat was shot by Tony Visconti on the set of the surrealist concert documentary *Born to Boogie*, directed by Ringo Starr. It's a striking image, but it was in the studio that Visconti's talents were truly displayed. Here he paired Bolan's 12-bar boogie, gonzo lyrical statements and spontaneous tracking sessions with lush, Phil Spector-indebted layering. The genius of his arrangements, the album's strings, horns, keyboards and backing vocals by Flo & Eddie were added later in Los Angeles and London.

THE ALBUM ENDURES AS A NEAR-PERFECT LISTEN FROM BEGINNING TO END

The Slider was a commercial and critical hit, peaking at No 4 on the British charts, with singles "Metal Guru" and "Telegram Sam" each getting to No 1. Though the material treads the same water as *Electric Warrior*, it also included some of Bolan's finest work, a stirring blend of '50s Americana, poetic authenticity and outright insanity. It speaks to the strength of Bolan's particular appeal that while critics might have noted how "Telegram Sam" was essentially "Get It On" with a fractionally refitted chorus, the song was welcomed by the young women who – as buyers of the records – often forecast music's future most accurately.

Visconti described *The Slider* sessions as the last good time the group had together. "That was the turning point," he told Paytress. "He became a monster after that." Indeed, Bolan's outsized ego would soon mark the death knell of his band, and his relationship with Visconti, the visionary producer who made his career. Against all odds, *The Slider* endures as a near-perfect listen from beginning to end, and the pinnacle of Bolan's musical and cultural influence, when he soared high above mere mortals, all alone without a telephone. ✪

"A FEW DUMMIES OUT THERE, EH? WE'LL SEE"

Bolan and T.Rex try to convince an unbelieving New York audience that they're the real deal. Caught in a no-man's land between David Cassidy teen pop and heavy rock, Bolan is forced to do his thing in a place where word of the glitter rock revolution has yet to spread. **ROY HOLLINGWORTH** witnesses an audience's cautious conversion.

MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 23, 1972

Melody Maker
£1 tickets for MM show
WISHBONE ASH AND ELP AT OVAL

"I HEAR HE'S quite big in England," said the lady backstage. "Yes, he is," I replied. "How big?" she asked.

"As big as The Beatles."

"Wow," she said, and there were a few ounces of scorn in the way she delivered it. If only she knew, I thought, if only she knew.

One way or the other it was New York City v Mr Marc Bolan, and the home side had all the advantages. There were a load out to put him down, a load there with free tickets wondering why they were there, and also a load of extremely dead people. The odds, as you might say, were fairly loaded. Oh, and the show wasn't even sold out.

But despite it all, the battle – and it was indeed a battle – was won by Bolan. In a little over an hour he created his own audience. He built beings capable of fun out of a selection of human cabbages, who were seemingly doomed to be bored for the rest of their lives. It was no mean feat, believe me.

Bolan's arrival in New York City was hardly sensational. Here he is looked upon as being a figment of an English imagination. He doesn't really exist, does he?

If he does exist, then he must exist for the 12-year-olds, which is David Cassidy's scene, and therefore he has nothing to do with rock'n'roll – so say the Americans.

To put it simply, Bolan does not have an audience over here. The heavy freaks think he's teenybop, and the teenybops think he's heavy, and unlike England, there is no audience that exists between those two categories.

So Bolan knew one thing when he stepped on American soil. He learned it last time he was over there. He knew damned well that if he was to succeed in America he'd have to create his own audience.

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES

Live in Canada, September 10, 1972

IT was Thursday, and extremely windy for New York. The time was around 6pm, and F Troop was a gas on Channel 11. There was a usual commercial break between the fun, and suddenly, looming out of the box was Bolan. A quick cut of him doing "Slider", and bending down a bit, and then stretching his face up to meet the camera.

"See him, and T.Rex, tonight at The Academy of Music." Christ, just two hours before the start of the concert and they're still advertising on the telescreen.

It had to be that way.

Hundreds of tickets had to be given out free – just to guarantee that the Academy would not be half-full. Argent were added to the bill, another teaser draw to get the people there. It had to be done that way, and it's no disgrace. They even did that with The Beatles when they first came over. You've got to swallow pride a bit over here.

Bolan swallowed his, and when he thought the time was right, he threw it back out again, and as I've said before, he won.

The Academy lies on 14th Street with 3rd Avenue, and from the outside looks like a flea-bitten old picture house, which in actual fact is precisely what it is (despite a renovation job). The area is dirty, and the dressing rooms – except for one – resemble public toilets.

The place looked to be about two-thirds full, and Argent were steaming away on stage. What a bloody fine band they are, and yet the audience reacted with an occasional sniff, and a handclap.

"They're dead out there. What the hell do they want?" Rod Argent had said as he came off stage.

"What are they like out there?" asked Bolan.

There's a few deadlegs, Marc.

"Oh well... Well... Well, we'll give it to 'em. Eh?"

BOLAN had the respectable dressing room at the top, and was rehearsing with Aretha Franklin's three back-up singers, who had joined him that day. Wife June was yelling along with them, and the Bolan was scrubbing away through a small amplifier. He looked in really good shape, and was screaming out "Hot Love".

Steve Currie, seemingly unmoved by anything, joined in on bass, and there was one hell of a boogie laid out in the dressing room.

Then the band, and the singers, and June get round in a circle, hold hands, hit a note, and scream. That's getting it on, and Bolan breaks out of the dressing room, and walks down the messy stairs. "A few dummies out there, eh?" says Marc. "We'll see."

The stairs are littered with strange-looking people – mostly women. It's like a scene from the inside of a brothel-cum-hotel in gin-soaked London, a few centuries back. They peer at Bolan, and smile, or just stare. There's another two bands in the building, and they just wait on those stairs and stare.

Backstage is a mite crowded too, but as you glance to the front from behind the curtain you can see that the audience is far from atmospheric. There's a lot of people walking about, or hanging around, and those that are seated look wet.

He'll have to work on this one.

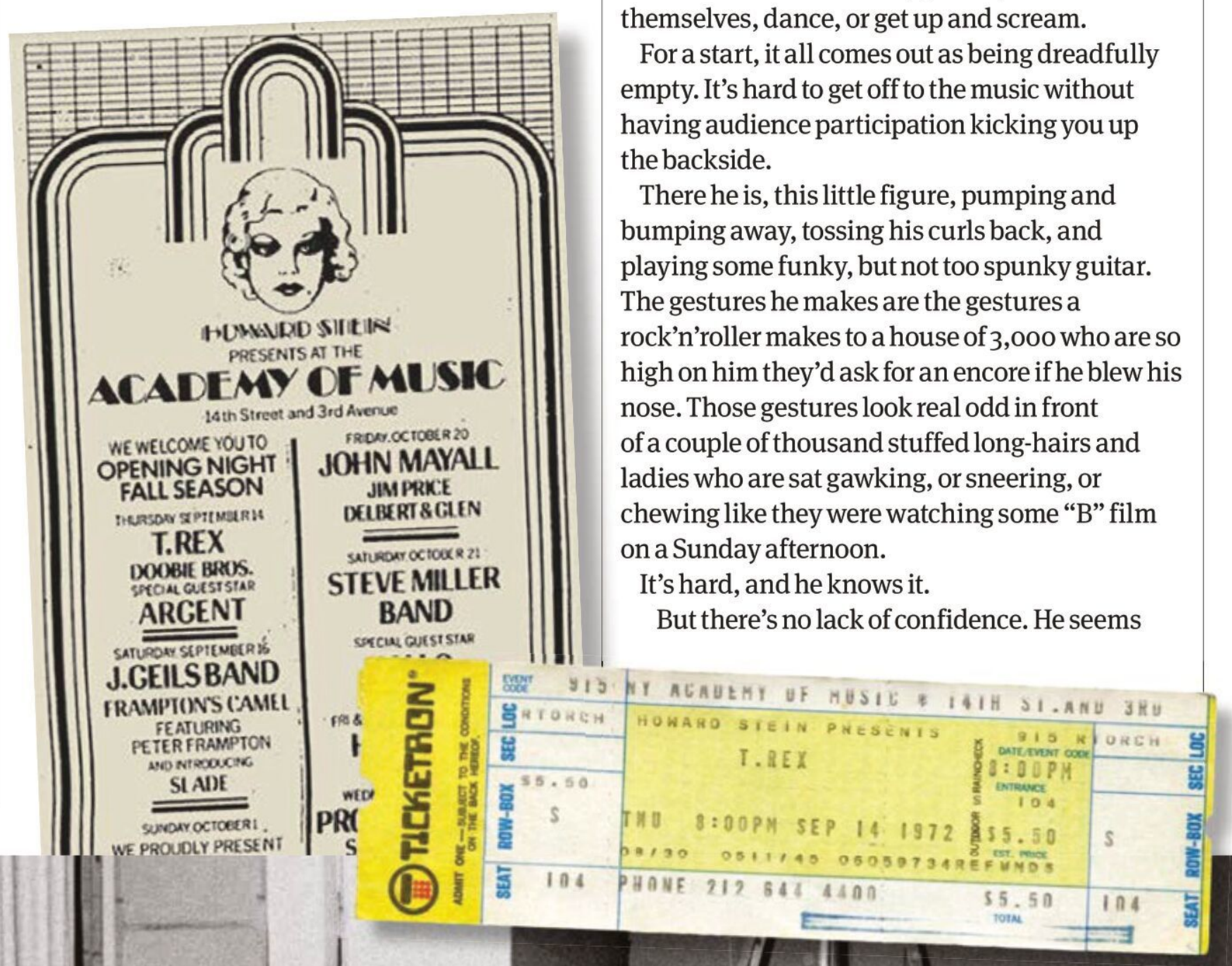
It's odd seeing Bolan perform in front of an audience that don't move, groove, wet themselves, dance, or get up and scream.

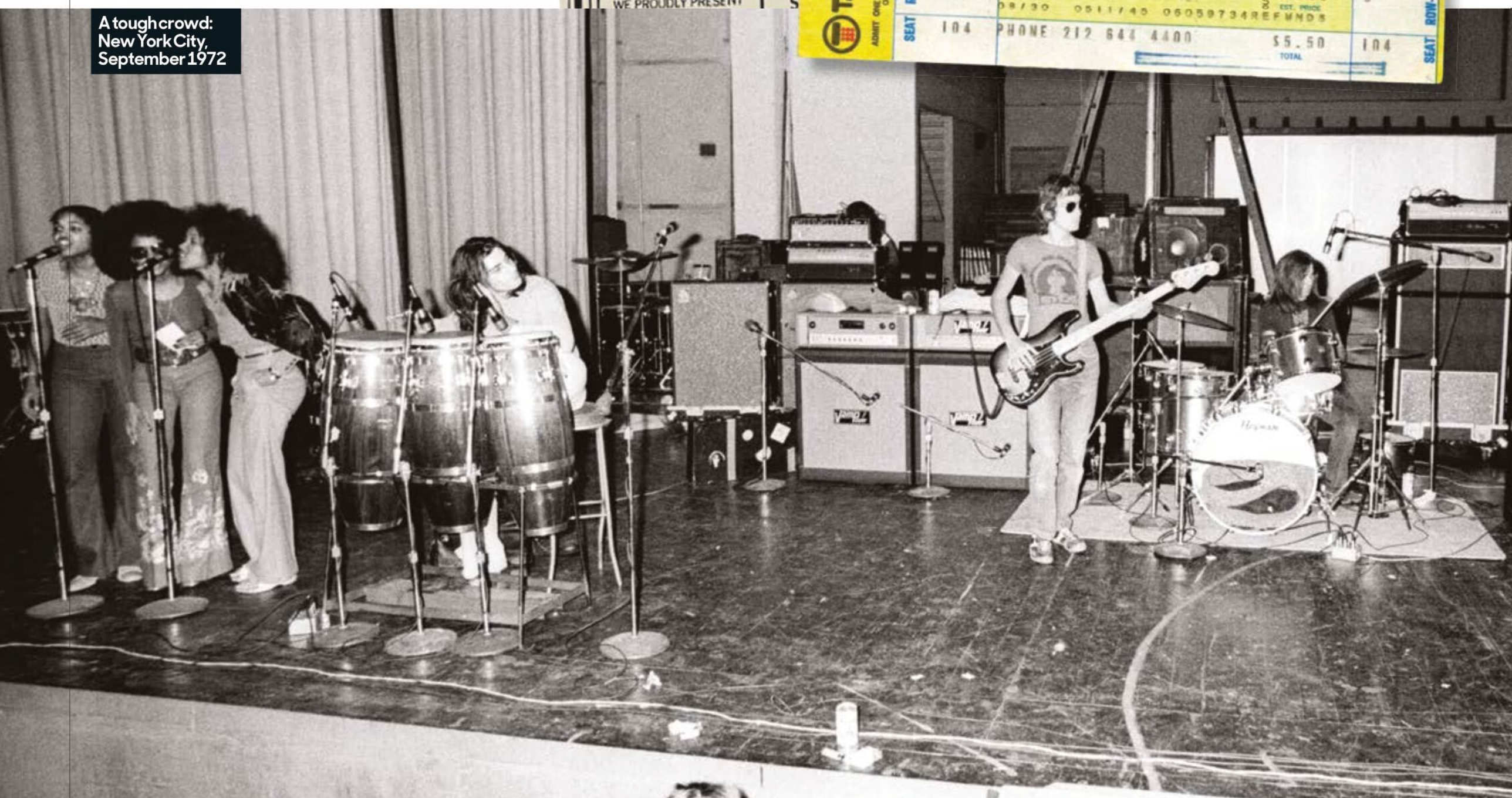
For a start, it all comes out as being dreadfully empty. It's hard to get off to the music without having audience participation kicking you up the backside.

There he is, this little figure, pumping and bumping away, tossing his curls back, and playing some funky, but not too spunky guitar. The gestures he makes are the gestures a rock'n'roller makes to a house of 3,000 who are so high on him they'd ask for an encore if he blew his nose. Those gestures look real odd in front of a couple of thousand stuffed long-hairs and ladies who are sat gawking, or sneering, or chewing like they were watching some "B" film on a Sunday afternoon.

It's hard, and he knows it.

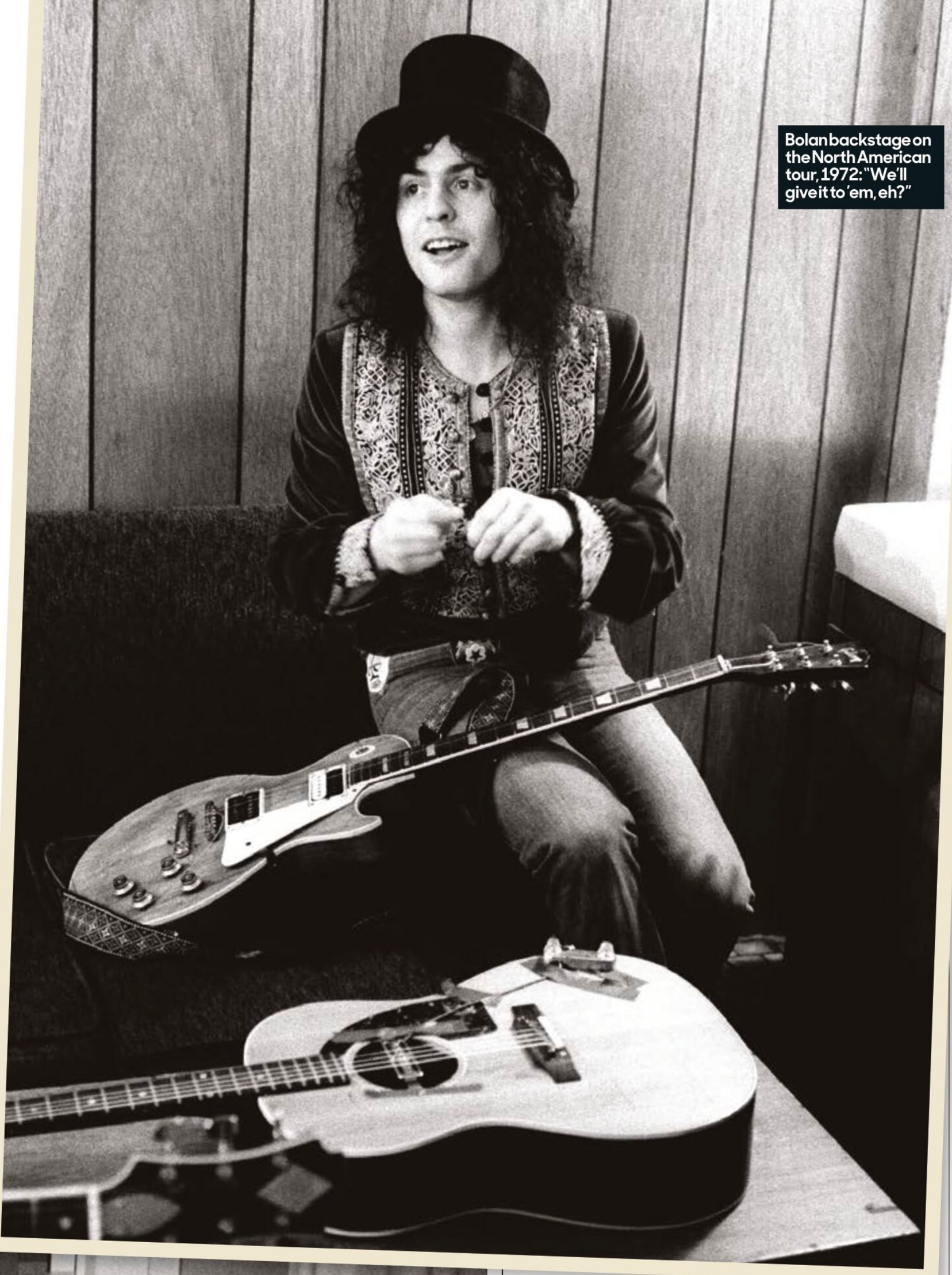
But there's no lack of confidence. He seems



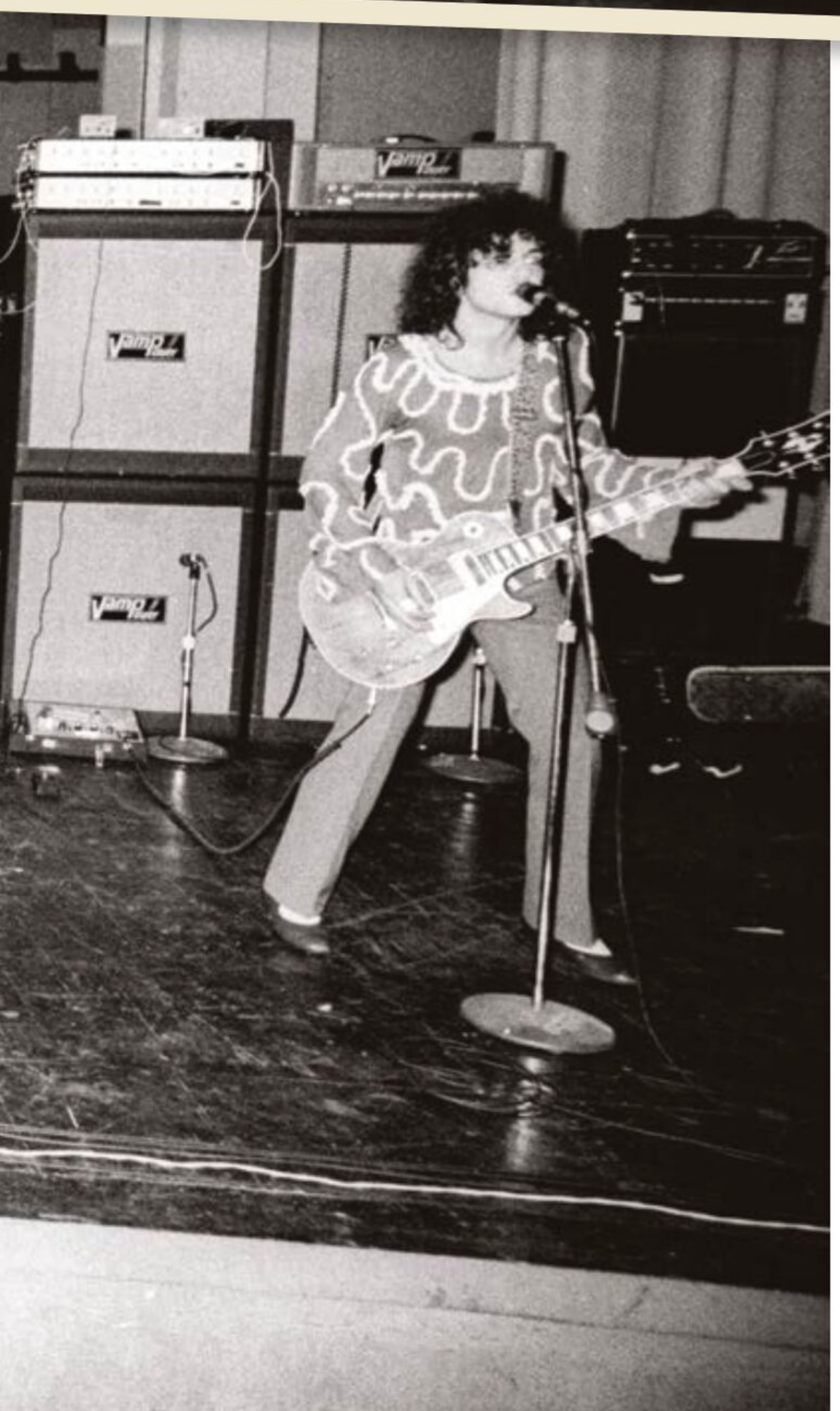


A tough crowd: New York City, September 1972

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



Bolan backstage on the North American tour, 1972: "We'll give it to 'em, eh?"



to be controlling his actions, but he's playing straight out and forwards, and refusing to hide in any shadows. Three numbers meet with only simple applause.

Every couple of rows or so is a real T.Rex fan – yes, there are actually a very small clan of them in New York City – and you can see them shaking a head. At the back there's a couple dancing.

He spat out "Telegram Sam", and he was getting better, although he was still playing more to the back of the stage, seemingly waiting for some really valid moment to step out onto the walkway that had been specially erected in front of the stage. Somehow you knew that moment was going to come.

Numbers were taken quickly – so there were obviously nerves buzzing in that Bolan body. You could sense that he was on edge, and waiting for that edge to go, and allow ego to gush out.

"Is this his hit single?" said the girl. "Yes one of them." "Oh gee, how many has he had?..." "Um, quite a load, actually..." "Oh gee," she said.

"Automatic shoes, automatic shoes, Gimme 3-D vision and the California blues."

"What's he singing?"

"It's 'Telegram Sam'."

"Oh."

Mickey Finn slapping away and Bolan moving, but still not down on his knees.

MUSICALLY it was sounding really sad. I tried living on an imaginary atmosphere, but it was useless. Take all the screamers away, and Bolan on stage has little to offer if you just want to hear music.

But if you want to get off to something that's fun, and just forget technicalities, he's got it – but without an audience that trip is like watching a juggler perform in Death Row.

He sat down, and did acoustic pieces, and was still really working hard to get something going.

He threw a towel out – but nobody caught it. Then one of those inexplicable things happened. He just started to boogie.

"Hot Love" seemed to rise a little, and then a shower of glitter fell from above the stage, and sparkled over the band, Bolan shimmied down the front, and a hundred or so light-bulbs lit his way as he trucked onto the stage extension.

For some reason the audience got up. Suddenly you were aware that an audience existed. They got up – and although it was a million miles removed from mania, they started to clap a bit, and actually sway around.

He'd done it – he'd achieved something, whether what he'd achieved was worth keeping was extremely questionable because it wasn't great, believe me. But he had got this load of drones on their feet with a set that was far from his best. It was a heartwarming sight.

And then he left it.

He left the stage, and didn't do an encore,

SO HERE WE HAVE THIS ROCK'N'ROLL STAR, BEING FORCED TO SHINE IN DAYLIGHT

even though the audience were getting "fairly frenzied" in their begging for one... Maybe that was a very wise idea.

He left having won something, and he wasn't going to flatter the audience by coming out and doing it again. Wise.

So here we have this rock'n'roll star, being forced to shine in daylight over here.

A lot of people say he should pack his sound out more, improve his guitar, learn to move. He could do all that, sure. But he wouldn't be Marc Bolan. Then they say his songs are all the same, and his words don't mean a thing.

There's really no answer to that, except in the eyes and ears of the beholder – and beholders he has many. It's anybody's guess whether he'll find beholders here. It might do the scene a lot of good if he did, that's for sure.

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES

TANX

RELEASED | MARCH 16, 1973

Fuelled by champagne and rampant egotism, Bolan ripped up a winning formula in order to stay one step ahead of his rivals. The result? An unlikely pathway out of the glam rock maze. BY PAUL MOODY

MARC Bolan was still pop's reigning monarch in December 1972, but his crown was beginning to slip. He may have had new best friend Ringo Starr and a hedonistic social circle including Keith Moon and Harry Nilsson to remind him of his own genius, but the critical failure of celluloid outing *Born To Boogie* had scuppered the star's plans to become – as he only half-jokingly put it – "Cecil B DeBolan".

More worryingly, the rise of rock behemoths Led Zeppelin had suddenly made T.Rex look and sound as terrifying as a dormouse, while Slade, Gary Glitter and The Sweet had all broken into the Top 10 with sledgehammer variations of T.Rex's glam rock blueprint. To make matters worse, old rival David Bowie had thoroughly upstaged him with the creation of his alien alter ego Ziggy Stardust.

Suddenly, Bolan's egotistical musings in the press were being laced with jealous sniping at his rivals. "I don't think that David has anywhere near the charisma or balls that I have," he told *Creem* in July 1973. "He's not gonna make it, in any sort of way. Slade is just a jive little group who are quite sweet and bang about a lot. Whether you think I'm good or bad, I'm still the best-selling poet in England."

Such hubris certainly seems justified when you consider T.Rex's magnificent run of stand-alone singles between September '72 and March '73. Magisterial in their arrogance, "Children Of The Revolution", "Solid Gold Easy Action" and "20th Century Boy" radiated confidence, mapping out continents of expression which the likes of Prince, The Smiths and Oasis – among others – would later explore. However, the failure of all three to reach No 1 only fed into a narrative which suggested that the man who had boasted, Muhammad Ali-like, on "20th Century Boy" that he could "*move like a cat, charge like a ram, sting like a bee*" was running on fumes.

"I honestly feel it could all end tomorrow," a frazzled Bolan told the press at the time."Not just the band thing – I mean life. But what will be will be. People tell me to take a holiday because I'm going to kill myself. But I just can't, I can't."

Alienated from his band by his titanic ego and Scrooge-like approach – despite T.Rex's success drummer Bill Legend and bassist Steve Currie were still on £40 a week wages, plus £26.50 for every recording session – Bolan had the look of a pop Napoleon as he hauled T.Rex back to his favourite recording studio, the Château d'Hérouville just outside Paris, for two short sessions in August and October 1972.

Conscious that he needed to escape the pop straitjacket to succeed in America, and insistent that no song should be attempted more than seven times, Bolan went into overdrive, laying down the basic tracks for the album's 13 tracks over nine days, as well as "Children Of The Revolution" and "Solid Gold Easy Action" ("20th Century Boy" was recorded in Tokyo in December during T.Rex's Japanese tour). However, while *Tanx* undeniably lacks immediacy without the sonic boom of the singles – glam's raison d'être, after all – it deserves re-examination precisely because its songs are so richly textured.

From sprawling opener "Tenement Lady" – inspired by a drinking session with Ringo and the writer Terry Southern in New York – it unfolds like a sonic tapestry. The sassy "The Street And Babe Shadow" , a mellotron-heavy "Mister Mister" and a melancholy "Highway Knees" are proof that when he wasn't chasing hits, Bolan could write songs of genuine depth, while a gritty "Country Honey" and "Rapids" provide flashes of the old glam magic.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"He's relaxed on it, indulging himself and losing tension in whole swathes of forgettable mediocrity. When you can't hang on to this stuff and remember the hookline after a couple of hearings, there's something wrong." RICHARD WILLIAMS, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 10, 1973

"Overall the 13 tracks tend to vary enormously in merit, with a substantial amount of the standard T.Rex thump'n'grind coming somewhere in between." JAMES JOHNSON, NME, MARCH 10, 1973

TRACKMARKS

1. Tenement Lady ★★★
2. Rapids ★★★
3. Mister Mister ★★★
4. Broken Hearted Blues ★★★★
5. Shock Rock ★★
6. Country Honey ★★★
7. Electric Slim And The Factory Hen ★★★★
8. Mad Donna ★★
9. Born To Boogie ★★
10. Life Is Strange ★★
11. The Street And Babe Shadow ★★★
12. Highway Knees ★★★
13. Left Hand Luke And The Beggar Boys ★★★★

Label: EMI
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded at: Château d'Hérouville, Paris
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar), Mickey Finn (percussion), Steve Currie (bass), Bill Legend (drums) Madeline Bell, Leslie Duncan, Vicky Brown, Barry St John, Sue & Sunny, Flo & Eddie (backing vocals), Tony Visconti (mellotron), Howard Casey (sax)
Highest chart position: UK 4; US 102

However, it's Springsteen-esque vignette "Electric Slim And The Hen Factory", sublime ballad "Broken Hearted Blues" and epic five-minute finale "Left Hand Luke And The Beggar Boys" which show the scale of Bolan's undiminished ambition.

Full of rippling pianos, dreamy saxophones and sweet vocal harmonies, they reflect Bolan's deep-rooted love of American funk, soul and gospel. "Most British artists at the time were in love with soul and funk music – Funkadelic, all that," recalled producer Tony Visconti. "So Marc had this interest in sounding more 'cool', more hip, y'know? He certainly had the rhythm in him; he knew that genre well."

ALIENATED FROM HIS BAND BY HIS TITANIC EGO, BOLAN HAULED T.REX BACK TO HIS FAVOURITE STUDIO

Bolan may have been seduced by the pop-star lifestyle, but he was still a fan at heart, spending long evenings at Visconti's flat in Earl's Court listening to the producer's American soul records. A case in point being "Left Hand Luke", which was inspired by eccentric New York DJ Montague The Magnificent's eponymous proto-rap sermon "The Montague Wvone Theme".

None of which can gloss over the fact that, at times, *Tanx* reflects Bolan's siege mentality. A limp "Born To Boogie", recorded too late for inclusion in the film, finds him sounding exhausted, while "Life Is Strange" ("*Some are fat, some are thin/ Some don't even ask you how you've been*") bears little comparison to the existential thrill of, say, "Life's A Gas". "Shock Rock", meanwhile, is a grouchy broadside at the glam opposition, Bolan cattily pointing out: "*If you know how to rock/You don't have to shock*".

Released on March 16, 1973, *Tanx*'s sleeve only seemed to confirm that the once all-conquering Electric Warrior was already past his best. Paunchy and pouting in front of a chrome-coloured toy tank, it seemed tacky and all too real in comparison to the alien allure of, say, *Ziggy Stardust*.

Its failure to climb any higher than 102 in the US charts, meanwhile, signalled the end of his ambitions for global domination. Marc's reign as pop's crown prince was officially over, but his peers were still taking notes. Two years later, *Tanx*'s soulful stylings would surely help provide the blueprint for Bowie's *Young Americans*.

"I REALLY GET OFF ON COMPETITION"

At a summer press reception in Chelsea, in the wake of the *Born To Boogie* film, Marc basks in his fame and ponders the monster – glam rock – to which he has helped give life. "The thing I find most interesting with the current Bowie thing," he tells **ROY CARR**, "is that it's happened to him so much quicker than it did with me." Later, he phones in to report from his latest attack on the USA.

NME | JUNE 16, 1973

AROUND the time London was swinging and love was still free, before rock stars were wasted and their girlfriends worked in massage parlours, the only person convinced that Marc Bolan was a star was Marc Bolan.

It never once entered his head that perhaps he was just living out his own teenage fantasy. Such was the measure of his self-confidence that he wasn't in any way embarrassed to proclaim his destiny to any who would allow him the privilege. Such things are apt to liven up a dull day, so it wasn't surprising that, in some quarters, the scrawny kid from Hackney with corkscrew hair and funny clothes was greeted with sniggers, sneers and ridicule.

"I was a cocky little sod in those days," Bolan recollects. "But I was right, wasn't I? In those days I really believed that I was born to be a rock'n'roll star."

He lubricates his solid gold easy action larynx with chilled champagne before stating... "But then, we're all rock'n'roll stars. Funnily enough," he continues, "I never thought like a rock'n'roll star, because I'm just a street punk b-a-b-e."

Though T.Rex have continued to dominate the charts with what many now consider to be predictable three-minute rushes of Bolanesque

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES. CHRIS WALTER/GETTY IMAGES

The best of frenemies: Bowie and Bolan, 1973

Boogie, in terms of the printed word, Bolan has remained virtually incommunicado.

"This is the first verbal interview that I've done in almost nine months and I've forgotten the procedure," he admits, while languishing amidst the flowers and weather-worn statues on the terrace of a chic Chelsea beanery situated at the unfashionable end of the King's Road.

I find it difficult to accept this last statement. Boley is a pro. He's more than fully conversant with all the rules of the game and how to handle himself in the clinches. Most important of all, he knows exactly to what degree to send up both his immediate company and himself.

As to whether Bolan's still as cocky as he was before he first made his presence felt, he replies: "Nah. But I've got reason to be if I was. The only reason I feel that people are prone to be flash and conceited is due to the fact that they lack inner self-confidence.

"The only thing that I'm aware of nowadays is that when I wake up every morning I'm still alive. I'm not so sure about anything else. I don't think that one can be, especially if as a musician you look upon what you do as being relatively serious."

Bolan is somewhat reticent to be drawn on this line of questioning – except to say, "Physically, I see so many people dying off, and that frightens me."

THOUGH it doesn't seem like it, almost three years have elapsed since Bolan rode his white swan into the charts and promised the girl who lived on the coast all manner of Hot Love.

Three summers since he prompted the male populace to discover the hitherto unknown delights of Woolworth's cosmetics counter, gave the boutique business a much-needed boost and became, as the national press gushed, "the biggest thing since The Beatles".

Those were the days (my friends) when it appeared that a whole generation was gripped in varying degrees of T.Rextasy – but along the line some cheers turned to sneers and those *Born To Boogie* posters turned into graffitied folk-art.

The fact remains it was Marc Bolan who opened the door for a vanguard of pop-tarts; and on the surface it may appear that he has been left ankle-deep in glitter, still holding the handle.

"What you mean is I let the cat outta the bag." He rolls his discreetly made-up eyes, licks his lips and jokes, "Just call me Frankenstein," before elaborating upon this subject.

"There's 75 per cent truth in that – but I suppose it's always nice to be looked on as some kind of innovator. If it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else. Look man, when that whole thing happened, visually the whole scene was a bit dead. I just brought back the weirdos."

What in fact Bolan did was to take the rejects off the post-Woodstock syndrome and re-kit them in swish silks'n'satins. Like all trends, this was soon to be totally devalued by horrendous mutations and the clutch of lesser talent and bandwagon-jumpers that haunt the periphery.

"I wasn't really trying to do anything. All that happened was that I had become bored with the way rock was being presented, while musically I was... just into Chuck Berry. And that's why T.Rex sounds like it does. I mean, when I wrote 'Get It On' I was just trying to re-write Chuck's 'Little Queenie'.

"As far as I'm concerned, I've no interest whatsoever in glam rock or whatever it is they're now calling it. I've no wish to get involved and I've cautiously avoided this for the last 18 months."

He emphasises: "I don't mean 'left out'. I mean uninvolved. Glam rock is now as dead as a door-nail to the point where it has become very boring. I'm into denim. I'm going back to Woodstock."

The names David Bowie and Gary Glitter become the topic of conversation. "I'm pleased to help people, pleased that I made it possible for them. But as to whether these people have stolen any of my thunder... I really get off on competition, insofar as the papers were ODing on me at the time.

"GLAM ROCK IS NOW DEAD AS A DOOR-NAIL TO THE POINT WHERE IT HAS BECOME VERY BORING. I'M INTO DENIM"
MARC BOLAN

"And last year I suddenly became extremely conscious of this, and it's because of what I observed that I have purposely chosen to lay back. I could see the way in which things were going. I didn't like it. I just didn't want to become involved with what was about to happen.

"Let's be honest about things – you can't out-glam Judy Garland, Gloria Swanson, Mae West and Marilyn Monroe. So why bother trying? It's totally immaterial to what you actually are. When I'm recording, I certainly don't ponce myself up in the same way I do when I'm on stage.

"I'm performing right now and I'm Marc Bolan when I'm at the office – but to be truthful, I can't take Marc-Bolan-the-Star all that seriously. When I'm at home, I'm just Marc Feld."

Having one's likeness faithfully reproduced 10 millionfold on posters, panties, T-shirts, pillowcases and other pop paraphernalia – then thumbing through an obnoxious American fanzine and learning that "Marc is a dishy English Elf, with come-to-bed-eyes and loves animals" can be somewhat disconcerting.

"I find most of it nothing more than surreal," says the object of the idolatry. "But again, I try no to get involved. Sure I love it.

"As you know, I always wanted to be a teenage idol.

"There's always time to be a Pasolini, but only a few short years in which to remain a teen idol. Just as long as your visual holds out and just as long as you choose to be concerned.

"But the thing you've got to remember is that I don't believe in images unless they're true. The only image is the one you see in the mirror.

"There's absolutely no way in which you can do an interview without sounding like utter crud. But they're fun – all they really are is self-analysis... primal screams. However, it enables you to look at all your bad points.

"Honestly, how can one not send themselves up in this business? You don't see me smashing my head against a wall or screamin' on my bleedin' knees."

As tactfully as possible, I ask him if he does such things in the privacy of his home. The smile vanishes from his face.

"Obviously, there are times when the balance goes. I either get extremely melancholy or exceedingly exuberant. It all depends on what I've been into... if you know what I mean."

Returning to his position as a graven image, Bolan insists, "If someone seriously put me alongside Donny Osmond and David Cassidy I would feel very insulted, for that takes away the fact that I'm a writer. However, on a photographic level I don't mind because they're real sweet studs."

One of Bolan's favourite anecdotes about criticism is that in one week he read both a praise and a put-down in two different publications – only to discover that they had in fact both been penned by the same person. Taking this into consideration, how vulnerable is the little fellow to adverse criticism?

Pop tart: at The Palace Hotel, Copenhagen, March 21, 1973

"A year ago it really used to upset me, but nowadays? It just doesn't bother me at all. You see, I've realised that getting perturbed isn't a viable proposition.

"Sure I read the critics," he says, "only because I find them to be quite interesting and I might learn something from them. But I don't get hurt any more.

"[*T.Rex concert film, directed by Ringo Starr*] *Born To Boogie* got slated to shit, but despite that it is now about the third biggest grossing picture in England. So I don't know if bad criticism really does you any harm."

It's for this reason that Bolan refuses to accept the consensus of opinion that insists that with each new single he resorts to reworking his proven formula.

"Everyone else has re-vamped 'Get It On' and 'Telegram Sam', except T.Rex. Certainly on 'Metal Guru', 'Children of The Revolution', 'Solid Gold Easy Action' and 'Twentieth Century Boy', the key, the structure, the tempo and the things that I do with tempo is totally different. I've only got one voice, man, so if you think my voice sounds the same on every record you could say the same thing about Mario Lanza.

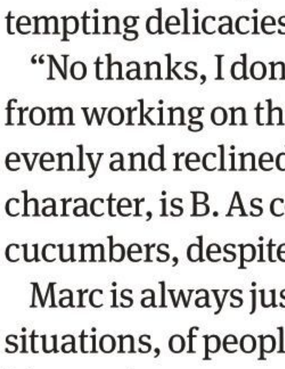
"'Children Of The Revolution' is nothing like 'Solid Gold Easy Action'. One uses strings, the other black chicks. One is medium-slow, the other super-fast. One thing I like about 'The Groover' is that it's a send-up. Listen to the words and you'll hear that it's an 'up-you' song. There's no aggression in it to the extent that I've purposely made it sound like a T.Rex record. And that's something I haven't done with the last four records. The only reason I did this is because everyone else is doing it and occasionally I'd like the kids to hear the real thing.

"Sure... when it comes to criticism, I've always had my share of the rough. So what? The thing I find most interesting with the current Bowie thing is that it's happened to him so much quicker than it did with me. At least I had a year of people saying things like 'Marc saved the industry'. Bowie only had four weeks."

By now the sun is high in the heavens and the endless stream of champagne makes the world appear a lovelier place. Having striven so long and so hard to live up to his mid-'60s boast, Bolan admits that in many ways he's not unduly concerned whether he'll be remembered by future generations. "If they do look back," says Bolan. "I think I will be the only one they'll remember – and only because I was a poet."

And if someone feels moved to write an epitaph on the Bolan crypt? "Let it be, 'I was born to boogie!'" And with that Bolan bursts into unrestrained laughter. *ROY CARR*

MELODY MAKER | JUNE 23, 1973


Melody Maker
DEEP PURPLE SPLIT
Radio One: time to give the fans what they want

TAKE heed – there is a great rumbling in the corridors of rock. And not all of it is emanating from the contents of my stomach. Marc Bolan, the man who started the pop revolution of the '70s, is about to launch into a new and perhaps more solid phase in his extraordinary career.

Marc looked a little rounder in the face, and saner in his demeanour when we met for the first time in about five months. A small gathering had been assembled in the garden of a King's Road restaurant, there to partake of strawberries, and chat of new directions for Mr B.

Marc was soberly clad – gone were the yellow satins and puffy creations of the days of Bolan Mania. And while others around him scoffed indiscriminately, Marc refused to touch any of the tempting delicacies.

"No thanks, I don't like strawberries. It comes from working on the fruit stall as a kid." He smiled evenly and reclined in his basket chair. A cool character, is B. As cool as a container of cucumbers, despite the blazing June sunshine.

Marc is always just one jump ahead, of situations, of people. His East End intuition is his weathervane, and he has a combination of honesty and logic that defies cracking. But there is a soft interior to the star who can still dream a little, and get his kicks from the music business – just like he did when scuffling in Notting Hill, in the wake of the music underground.

At the peak of Bolanmania – Marc called it "the madness" – he seemed in danger of burning himself up, although his natural resilience and good humour bore him through with flying colours.

The Bolan story was being told in countless publications, tour followed tour, and hit singles kept pouring out. They still are – as a matter of chart fact. There was his heroic assault on America that failed to win him the acclaim so readily bestowed at home. There was *Born To Boogie* and his association with Ringo Starr. And softly, softly – T.Rexstasy, (the phrase coined by my esteemed colleague Michael Watts), slipped away.

But stay! It could well be that the Bolan Story has only just begun. For Marc has many plans nestling under his curls that will silence the bitter cry of "He's finished".

"'The Groover' had 100,000 advance orders," he revealed, as we discussed the condition of his latest outpouring. "We did it in Amsterdam and it was one of seven tracks from the end of our last European tour. It was the only one I wanted out as a single. It has that T.Rex Sound, and I doubt if I'll put any more singles out with that sound.

"It was so much a product of its time, and a great many people have been influenced by that sound. If you listen to the lyrics of the new song 'Groover' you'll hear that really it's a send-up. '*Some call*

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

Performing "The Groover" on *Top Of The Pops*, June 1973

me Jeepster – some call me lame'..."

"All the new stuff is different and is evolving in a different direction. I'll be using more guitar and we go to Germany soon to record six more tracks. I like the idea of staying in one place for enough time to experiment, and also there are a lot of fine horn players in Germany. We'll spend a few days getting things down.

"I've never worked like that before, but I've had a bit of experience working as a session man myself lately. I've done a few tracks with Ringo and some with Harry Nilsson.

"Oh, and also I'm putting out a record I wrote in Barbados when I was there with Ringo, It's a piece of reggae called 'Black Jack' with a group called Big Carrot consisting of some girl singers from LA. Yes – I have been around a lot lately. I've got another band I'm doing an album with, but I can't name them yet. I want to make them the ultimate heavy superstars – what Velvet Underground should have been like.

"There's a lot of things I want to do – I'm feeling looser now than I have ever done before. There are songs I can do now that would have been out of context before. There will be a Marc Bolan solo single and a solo LP coming. There won't be any changes in the lineup of T.Rex, but I would like to make a few additions. The guys in the band are really good musicians, but I'd like to add a guitar player, a brass section and some singers."

"The solo album we'll call Marc Bolan and not T. Rex, so that the sweet babies out there don't get confused and expect an LP of T.Rex hits. If I do a solo single, it won't be like the T.Rex sound either.

"I've got a lot more freedom now. I could do a solo LP of poetry, or an album of electronic music. I've even got my own label to do it on, without harming the validity of T.Rex. All this doesn't mean I'll put out 55 LPs of me farting in the moonlight, but it will free me from instant comparisons. And if I'm not well established now, then I never will be.

"You'll notice I've been laying back for a year. That was deliberate, and I was allowing the madness to move away. I enjoyed the madness and being born to boogie. But I can see more clearly now. I'll accept that I'm blatantly commercial 'cos I enjoy it, but I'd like to do something beyond the simple Bolan rock'n'roll, and if only a quarter of the kids come with it, then it wouldn't matter,

"I've put so much out in the past, and its not always been good, even though we liked to think it was at the time."

Was there any particular number that he had second thoughts about now, I inquired, absently swallowing my fourth cake of pâté impregnated with garlic?

"'Children of The Revolution' – that should have been better. I loved the one in the film, but the one we put out as a single was rushed."

When would Marc start his new era of expansion, I queried, swilling back a tumbler of chilled champagne?

"It's happening now. We'll be enlarging the band with the guitar player, and a keyboard as well. I like saxes, so we'll have a brass section, oh, and some chick singers. If I'm disastrously wrong about this, then it'll be my fault alone.

"We could go out on the road tomorrow as a four-piece and tour, and the kids would make it great. But I would have to consider whether I was happy musically. I don't just want to expand the band to make it louder, y'know. It's not the volume that's important. I think it's time for growth and development and I find it very exciting. I'm going to use the freedom success has given me, and I don't want to go off and live in the country and not be seen for five years. If you get good people around you, it's never a problem.

"I'm going to do an American tour at the end of July and Japan in September. Hopefully I'll be playing in England at the end of October, when the next LP is out. I don't want to go on the road now for fear of being involved in the dying embers of glam rock. I don't feel involved in it – even if I started it. That's not my department any more."

Did Marc think the glam rock syndrome had become debased, I checked, swallowing a plateful of strawberries, a selection of stuffed marrows, washed down with another magnum of champagne.

"Yes, it was embarrassing personally, and not what I wanted to do. I'm not quite convinced that a performer has to be a freak. I'm just a street punk. A burden? No! I think I moved away from it all at the right point. I enjoyed being screamed at and when we initially started the screaming, it was a phenomenon, chicks screaming and having your hair pulled out. Now it's commonplace and it's lost the whole point of what it was all about.

"After a while the phenomenon loses its originality, totally. I enjoy it – sure. The whole thing is lovely, if you can look at it with humour. I want to avoid resting on my laurels. I feel obliged to the kids, and to the industry to do something in return.

"Rock'n'roll is a great thing and it still gets me off, and there are a million things I want to do. But Marc, how long can it go on? Go on... you haven't asked me that one yet."

But my mouth was too stuffed with further portions of garlic pâté, some spring onions and green peppers to reply. Eventually I grunted to the effect that Marc's public seem to have remained loyal.

"They seem to be, don't they? I still get 10,000 letters a week, and places like Japan and Germany are still ridiculous. The whole point of why you are asking me these questions ('What questions?' I said indistinctly), is because I was getting over-exposed. It was very much a controlled move to hold back on everything. It's three years now and I've had 10 hits. I'm just surprised that I'm here

DAVIDREDFERN/REDFERNS

at all. I still can't walk down the street without getting stopped."

It sounded as if Marc was very much in control of his situation. He nodded and said: "I allow things to change me. I wouldn't do a gig now without rehearsals, and we used to do gigs that were disasters."

Is the States still a challenge for Marc?

"Not really. I've not put any singles out there for a long time. 'The Groover' is the first one we've put out there in years."

Are there any plans for further motion pictures, following the success of *Born To Boogie*? "Yes and no. I'll do another film – I'm putting together a sort of T.Rex documentary. I've got so much footage we could use covering the rise of T.Rex. I've done a really good film for *Top Of The Pops*, by the way – glam rock at its peak. But later on, I'd like to take an acting role that had nothing to do with being Marc Bolan. I did quite a bit of acting as kid; Ringo is such a good actor, but he won't admit it. I might still be doing that TV series in Japan, and I might even call myself Zinc Alloy.

"*Born To Boogie* has been dynamite. There's a lot wrong with it, but it was made as a lightweight piece of T.Rex propaganda. Every time the school holidays are on we put it out. What's that great American phrase? 'A film for the youth market.'"

I could not answer him. The sun beating down had brought on a condition known as drastic gastric, and Marc, cool as ever, bid us adieu, as I tottered in search of a comfort station – another great American phrase. *CHRIS WELCH*

MELODY MAKER | SEPTEMBER 1, 1973

Melody Maker
Neil Young dates
JAMES TAYLOR IN MM SHOW

DESPITE the critical savaging that Marc Bolan regularly receives, he ain't gonna do a Jethro Tull and give up. Marc was accused of being "embarrassing" and "monotonous" in a Stateside *Melody Maker* review only last week.

But says Marc: "I'm used to adverse criticism, but I'm not retiring. I'll do a Greta Garbo one day, but not yet. I can't wait to play in England again. We're playing Japan in October and I'd like to play five or six dates in England in December."

The Bolan thirst for work and his mission to break T.Rex as a regular rock band, and not just a British chart phenomenon, continues unabated. And he has poured all his energy into his current American tour. He remains quite undismayed by the fault-finding, justified or otherwise, in his stage presentation, and gritting teeth, battles ever forwards.

On the transatlantic phone from St Louis this week, Marc sounded tired, his voice abrasive. But it was 7.30am and he was just waking up, ready to leave in 20 minutes for New York, on the endless treadmill of a US tour.

But as consciousness returned, the old Bolan spark revived. He managed a quick dig at Three Dog Night, revealed he has been nearly killed on stage in Idaho, and had been recording more material than most rock artists produce in a lifetime.

"I've been in the States for five weeks, and it feels like a lifetime. It always does. No, I'm not really exhausted. The tour has been much easier than I thought it would. I wasn't sure if I ever wanted to play 'live' again, but this has been such fun, I'm determined to carry on. There was a time when I was bored with the old act. But now I'm using a guitar player and chick singers. Unfortunately there was very little time for rehearsal. But it's 'rocking' as we say, and 'boogie-ing'.

"We've cut the act down to one hour and we play six numbers. No not old hits at all, all new stuff. We've recorded a lot while we've been here, but there never seems enough time to do everything. We did four tracks at Atlantic in Al Green's studio, and next we are going to Electric Lady in New York. We've got Gerry Stickells, Jimi Hendrix's old road manager, on the tour with us, by the way.

"Basically we've been working with Three Dog Night, playing all the big ball parks. We did a couple of gigs with Humble Pie and mad Steve Marriott, which was nice. The reaction has been very much better than I thought. We got told off in

"I'VE BEEN LAYING BACK FOR A YEAR. I WAS ALLOWING THE MADNESS TO MOVE AWAY"
MARC BOLAN

a very mild sort of way by Three Dog Night, for saying the wrong things. You see, we're a different band from them. We've got a heavier stage act visually."

"I finish the act by whipping the guitar to death and all the PA cabinets explode. We're using the Pink Floyd's PA and we've got 180,000 watts or something. We can't even hear each other wink – let alone sing. So you see, we're very hard to follow.

"It's all got much better than I thought it would, and at least half the audiences are T. Rex fans. In fact, we've been blowing Three Dog Night off stage! Having Jack Green from Glasgow on guitar takes a load off my shoulders, and I have more freedom – to get grooving with the babies. What happened to the brass section? We tried it. And it didn't work."

Marc will be back in Britain on September 4, and he's got a new single coming, which may be "Venus Loon". "But it's a bit obscene. We'll have to sort it out when I get back. There'll be a new LP as well and there are 10 titles for that, which will be out in October."

Suddenly our conversation was interrupted by an Indian voice saying "Hello." This went on for some minutes with the sound of happy children's laughter and the heavy burring of digits being dialled.

"Hello, who is that?"

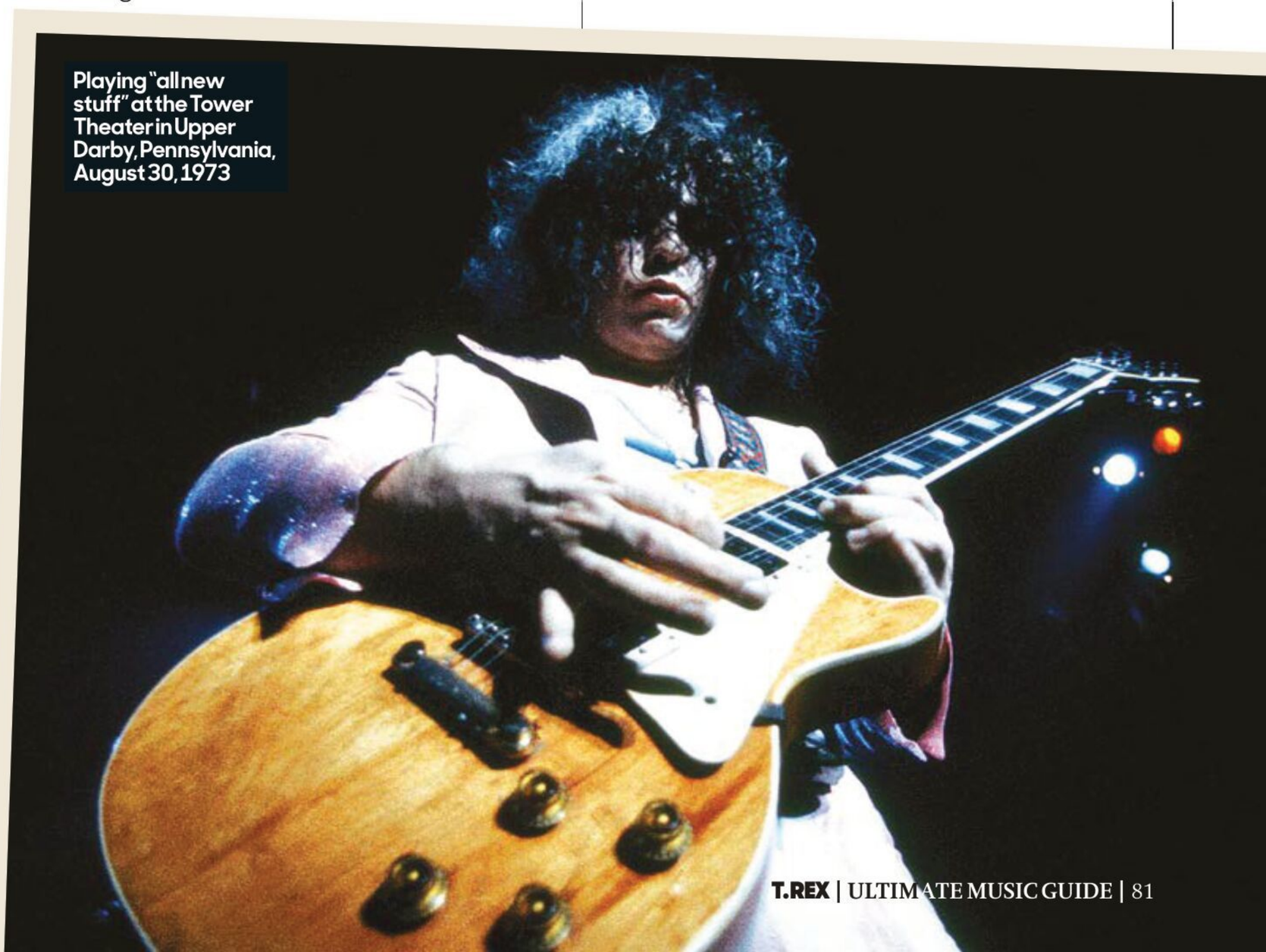
"You've got a crossed line," said Marc patiently from St Louis. "Will you please ring off?" I demanded in London. "I am sorry," said the intruder, apparently in Bombay. The children, possibly in Amsterdam, laughed heartily and magically the line cleared.

"I was saying," said Marc, "has the story about the crashing light crane broken there yet? I was playing in Idaho the other night when the crane fell over and crashed on stage, missing my head by half an inch. Another half inch and I wouldn't be talking to you right now. Maybe that's it. I'm in heaven! It was really freaky.

"It happened at the – wait for it – Rock Island Line Pop Festival. Oh, the rock island line is a mighty fine road. Well anyway, the wind blew this tower over, and it nearly smashed me head in. I'm very lucky to be alive. The Bolan brains would have been all over the stage. But I just zapped out the way and carried on playing me guitar. The show must go on. y'know."

High winds permitting, the Bolan will be zapping back to England soon, quite unabashed by press reviews, jet lag and falling metal. You can't keep a good bopper down. ✪

CHRIS WELCH


Playing "all new stuff" at the Tower Theater in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, August 30, 1973

ICON AND IMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

MARC BOLAN & T. REX

ZINC ALLOY AND THE HIDDEN RIDERS OF TOMORROW

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1, 1974

The teenage dream fading, Bolan gets slapdash with his songcraft.

BY DAVID QUANTICK

GLAM rock was always a retro-futurist kind of music, simultaneously looking backwards and forwards. Even its more apparently sci-fi aspects – the shiny outfits, the sparkly platforms – were more to do with a 1950s vision of the space age than a real sense of futurism (as evinced by the ultimate glam musical, 1973's *Rocky Horror Show*). And glam, despite Bowie's apocalypse and Roxy's soundscapes, was often nostalgic: "The Six Teens", "Drive-In Saturday", "2HB", "Rock'n'Roll Parts 1 & 2", Mud's entire oeuvre, all harked back to a lost era. And no wonder: for even if glitter rock was the new sound of the early 1970s, making your brother back home with his Beatles and his Stones feel old, the people making the music were by no means the young generation. Acts like Slade (formed 1966), The Sweet (1968), Mud (1966) and Bowie himself (first single, "Liza Jane", 1964) were musicians who'd trodden a great deal of water before the tide of glam swept them into the charts.

There was nobody more aware of this than Marc Bolan ("The Wizard", 1965). Three years had passed since T.Rex had become the first band to inherit the fan hysteria of Beatlemania, and not only had Bolan's young fans grown older and moved on, but also the simple riff/surreal lyric combination of classic T.Rex had become rather old. And so in 1973, echoing a TV show that also tapped into '70s nostalgia for the recent past – *Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads* – T.Rex released a single that asked, "*Whatever happened to the teenage dream?*" In response, the world shrugged: "Teenage Dream" peaked at No 14, the first Bolan single since his hippie days to miss the Top 20. The album it was taken from, *Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow*, did only marginally better, getting as far as No 12. Whatever was happening with the teenage dream was no longer taking place near Marc Bolan.

There were other factors worrying Bolan at this time: the very title of this album is a far-from-veiled reference to Bolan's former competitor David Bowie and *Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* (Bowie had of course written "Lady Stardust" about Bolan and also done a top Bolan-singing-like-a-sheep impression on *The Man Who Sold The World*'s "Black Country Rock"). Chartwise, Bowie was breaking into America with *Aladdin Sane*, while *Zinc Alloy...* was not even released in the USA; but at least musically, the two were still – just about – in a similar place, still ringing the changes on conventional rock'n'roll (although Bowie had just ditched his band and would soon adopt the first of many new sounds). But the main problem for Bolan at this point in his career was neither his rivals nor his stellar past, but his own music. While it's to his credit that *Zinc Alloy...* does attempt to broaden Bolan's musical horizons, it's also true that this is not a very good album (a state not helped by the fact that reissues tend to bulk it up with era-relevant singles like "The Groover").

Marc Bolan was something of a prisoner of his own style. While a gifted songwriter in his own way, he lacked the eclectic curiosity of a Bowie or the sheer range of even a Slade (whose late-glam-era singles display real maturity and musical growth): and he didn't have a songwriting team like Mud, Sweet and Suzi Quatro. As such, he was reliant on nagging hooks, catchy choruses and the imagination of regular producer Tony Visconti; and by the time *Zinc Alloy...* came out, the first two were either inadequate or absent.

Even the single "Teenage Dream", while melodic and memorable (Bolan apparently considered it his finest lyric), is somewhat draggy, evoking the kind of dream one gets from a pipe in an opium den. But its conventional structure makes it stand out on what is a terrifically scrappy album. There are simply not any great songs here, and Visconti has been compelled to adopt the classic producer's approach to a no-great-song situation and bring in a lot of covering fire to disguise the

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"The whole thing puts you in mind of a half-cocked production line content at one stab of glory." ANDREW TYLER, NME, MARCH 2, 1974

"What matters is the overall combination of the Bolan charisma, the pulse of rock and the inspiration by which the components are married. There's a lot more life, guts and twists of the unexpected here..." CHRIS WELCH, MM, MARCH 9, 1974

ZINC ALLOY

TRACKMARKS

1. Venus Loon ★★★
2. Sound Pit ★★★
3. Explosive Mouth ★★
4. Galaxy ★★
5. Change★★
6. Nameless Wildness ★★
7. Teenage Dream ★★★
8. Liquid Gang ★★
9. Carsmile Smith & The Old One ★★
10. You've Got to Jive to Stay Alive – Spanish Midnight ★★★★
11. Interstellar Soul ★★
12. Painless Persuasion v The Meathawk Immaculate ★★
13. The Avengers (Superbad) ★★★
14. The Leopards Featuring Gardenia & The Mighty Slug ★★★

Label: EMI
Produced by: Tony Visconti
Recorded: Musicland Studios, Munich
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar), Mickey Finn (percussion), Bill Legend (drums), Steve Currie (bass), Danny Thompson (double bass), BJ Cole (steel guitar), Jack Green (guitar), Lonnie Jordan (keyboards), The Cosmic Choir (backing vocals), Tony Visconti (Mellotron)
Highest chart position: UK 12; US –

absence of substance. So we get a lot of very prominent backing vocals. Backing vocalists had always been part of the T.Rex sound, but where before Flo and Eddie provided a wailing, hooky backdrop to Bolan's distinctive voice and complemented the mighty riffing, here the Cosmic Choir – led by Bolan's new partner, Gloria Jones – are so powerful that they not only overwhelm the thin material, they point up just how thin that material is. It's all a bit Emperor's New Clothes, except here the clothes are magnificently colourful and it's the Emperor who is invisible.

BOLAN'S GUITAR IS WILD AND OFTEN FUNKY... GLORIA JONES' VOCALS ADD A SOULFUL EDGE

THERE are elements of the new sound that are promising. Bolan's guitar is wild and often funky. Gloria Jones' vocals add a soulful edge.

On some songs, you can see that Bolan's songwriting has developed in sophistication (the gorgeous "Spanish Midnight") or at least not lost its catchiness ("Venus Loon", "The Avengers (Superbad)"). But these moments are rare. Songs come and go, unnoticed by the listener. Songs with titles whose meaninglessness once seemed intriguing are now just meaningless: and sometimes – as in (deep breath), "The Leopards Featuring Gardenia And The Mighty Slug" they promise a level of almost-proggy ambition that is not borne out by the sheer sketchiness of the material.

In fact, sketchiness is the main issue with *Zinc Alloy*.... There's a real sense that most of these 14 songs have been dashed off. Nothing, bar "Teenage Dream", seems properly worked out: even the aforementioned, excellent "Spanish Midnight" is one half of a two-song medley. And the longer the song title, the more ordinary the content, as though Bolan is hoping that giving a song an epic name will make up for its musical shortcomings (certainly, at 3:30, "Painless Persuasion vs The Meathawk Immaculate" is one of the shortest musical suites ever recorded). All of which does tend to make the listener wonder if perhaps Marc Bolan's strength always lay in writing great singles and the odd fantastic melancholy ballad.

Bolan would make better albums than this, and would, at the time of his death, regain the reputation he'd lost, but at this point in his career he was not making great music. As a collection of songs, *Zinc Alloy*... is a disappointment, and as an album it's a scrappy mess. ✪

"I'M STILL THE SUPERSTUD"

A strange year for T.Rex as **MARC BOLAN** returns, larger than life, with *Zinc Alloy*.... In Glasgow, **NME** is astonished at the scale of the "glitter chipolata", and is confronted by a prickly and defensive interviewee in early summer. As he readies his new *Zip Gun* at year's end, he has become a Monaco tax exile apparently planning a film with David Bowie. "He's very 'up' at the moment, like me..."

NME | FEBRUARY 2, 1974

LOOKING not so much the elongated Elf as the Porky Pixie, Marc Bolan returned to Glasgow's Apollo Theatre last Tuesday, amid uncontrolled hysteria, deafening screams and seat-vaulting Rextatics.

For Bolan and his new sidekicks it was a triumph. A two-year absence from British gigs has left him more powerful and godlike than ever before. But, taken as a musical experience, it was dire. Never, I thought, have so many screamed at so little. A teenage dream turned nightmare.

And yet it started so well. Bolan's entrance was stunning – a huge star picked out in lights in the centre of the stage with Bolan wedged against it, a superstructure at the back of the stage with the letters T.REX shining out in hundreds of bulbs – a cross between Blackpool illuminations and the Coca-Cola ad at Piccadilly circus.

And in the middle of it all a decidedly plump Bolan – the man who claims glam rock is dead – wearing white trousers with glitter motifs, and a shimmering silver-and-black satin cloak arrangement.

Let's get one thing straight – Bolan thinks he's a star, acts like a star and says he's a star. The audience believe him, too. He just didn't convince me. Right from the opening number "20th Century Boy" (which sounded for the first two minutes like "Telegram Sam") it was obvious the sound

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Employing every trick in the book: Bolan and T.Rex on stage in 1974

quality wasn't up to much. Muddy would be a better word, perhaps. Bolan sounded not unlike a person singing into a wet dishcloth.

But give the porcine poseur his due – he tried and oh-how-they-screamed. They screamed so sodding loud, they didn't give a damn about the music. Hell, it'd been two years since they'd seen him in the flesh; they'd paid around thirty bob for the privilege and they were going to relish every minute.

T.Rex have increased in number – two drummers as well as Mickey Finn on percussion, plus Steve Currie on bass, two chick singers, two brass and a guitarist. All hardened professionals – yet at this, their second gig together, far from tight.

Still, it was Bolan's night and, looking not too dissimilar from a glittering chipolata sausage, he rolled around the place, employing every trick in his book, ie strutting, kneeling down, leaning back, turning his back to the audience, leaping, wiggling, gyrating and thrusting his pelvis. Every twitch was, as might be expected, greeted with loud screeches.

Prior to "The Groover" much ado was made about the guitarist (Jack Green) who, we gathered, came from Glasgow. More screams. Guitarist comes to front of stage, mutters something inaudibly into the mic and takes a bow.

"Jeepster" was boring because it went on for too long. The two drummers (who should be awarded Duke of Edinburgh gold medals for endurance) constantly pump out the beat while Bolan exits briefly to remove his cloak and reappear in a tight-fitting black-and-silver top revealing heavy pectoral muscles.

God, he's not just got balls, he's got boobs. Anyway, at this point Marc leaps onto centre dias star, slips and falls. Helpless on his back like an upturned tortoise, he was assisted to the side by Mickey Finn and, like a football scrum near the back of the stage, people crowded round to see how much damage had been done to the Star. Not much, by the look of things.

By now the screams were mounting, as 14-year-olds wondered if Marc was going to return. He did, of course, but then you knew that, didn't you?

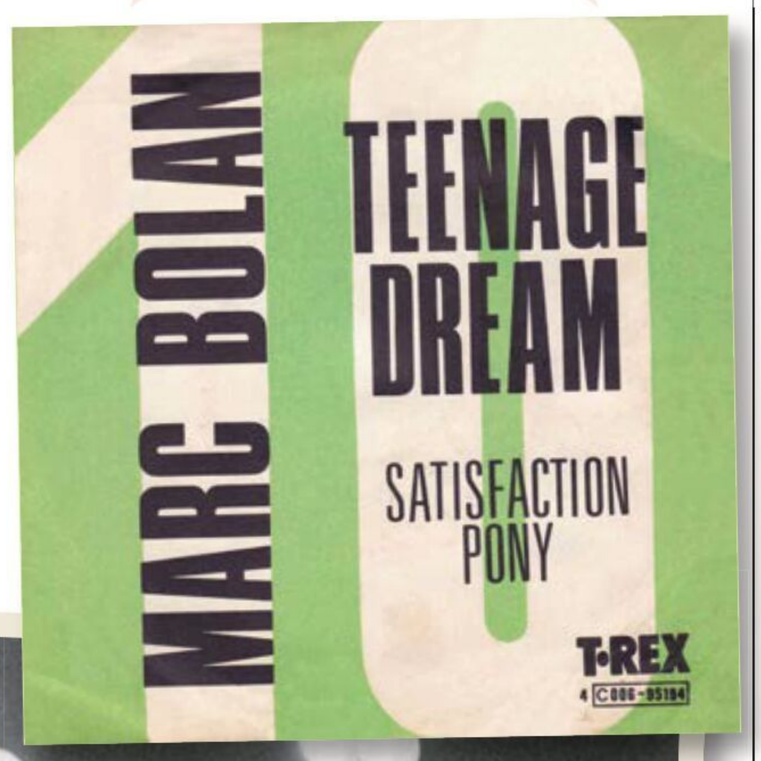
"Teenage Dream", which I was informed by the man from EMI, is not only the new single but "the best thing he's ever done", was announced – but since the PA wasn't up to much only the odd word came through. Certainly it's a departure for Bolan, heavily featuring the two chick singers and containing those immortal words: "*Whatever happened to the teenage dream?*"

Indeed. What did happen?

"Telegram Sam" and "Metal Guru" were greeted with screeching reverence, as was a somewhat long version or "Hot Love". But it was "Get It On" that got them off. Bolan now has Arthur Max helping him on the visuals, and much effort had been put into the special effects for this last number. So, apparently out of nowhere, dry ice produced a smoky mist which first ascended then descended from the stage down to the first few rows, giving a waterfall effect.

Marc attacked his guitar with a tambourine and finally with a large whip – all very erotic, I suppose, yet the violent attack had a compelling effect on the crowd, who were by this time quite pixielated. As the final gesture Bolan threw the whip away in the direction of an amp (a dummy) which exploded. End of gig.

"I ALWAYS FEEL SLIGHTLY EXPOSED PLAYING LIVE, BUT I DON'T THINK YOU COULD BE BORED"
MARC BOLAN



DAVID WARNER ELLIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Scottish musician Jack Green adds a second guitar at Birmingham Odeon, January 28, 1974

OUTSIDE the Apollo young ladies were screaming and even at his hotel there were some ever-hopefuls waiting for a glimpse or a grope of their Marc. A lady from *Jackie*, who one would imagine to be a Bolan freak, is commenting that she thought him "terrible. What does he think he's trying to do?" A daily newspaper man is still trying to look for a riot to report on, while Bolan's publicist is jollying the whole proceedings along.

Some time later in a suite on the 10th floor the press are introduced to the Man. It's hushed as Marc talks into a tape for the benefit of a local radio station, and five minutes later we're introduced.

The new single, which bears the credit "Marc Bolan and T.Rex" is, I'm informed, wrongly labelled. "It should just be Marc Bolan," says Zinc. The production credit is wrong as well. "It just says 'produced by Tony Visconti' when it should say 'Marc Bolan and Tony Visconti'."

In cold hard print that quote sounds 'orrible big time. OK – he is big time but in a likeably arrogant manner.

The new album scheduled for release in early February and entitled *A Creamed Cage In August By Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow* was recorded in six different countries.

"We started off in Germany and cut 22 tracks there. I'm not sure what will happen to some of the tracks. We've got a lot of technical problems."

As far as Marc is concerned the Apollo show was a victory. "I'll admit to being slightly surprised that the kids are still as young and that I'm still the superstud. I was never this hot before – they can't believe I'm real. Musically we're far, far superior – I always feel slightly exposed playing live, but I don't think you could be bored watching the show."

The opening night of the tour in Newcastle confirmed Bolan was still huge in terms of teenyboppers, many of whom apparently leaped on stage.

"Someone scratched me in the eye and someone else gave me a love bite. Kinda cute – but you don't know where her teeth have been."

I comment that the two-year "retirement" from British gigs has obviously had the desired effect and am immediately picked up.

"It wasn't a 'retirement'. I had too much to do and I didn't want to play as a four-piece."

And just how permanent is the present band? "As permanent as rock'n'roll. I'm very erratic and eccentric – it's as permanent as it needs to be. In March we're going to America... Well, nothing has actually been set up but it will have to be March because there's no other time I can go.

"After that, well, I can't tell you what I'm doing – just that it's a film but I've promised I won't talk about it. Then there's my record company... I'm setting up my own company. I've already produced two albums and I'm doing three more. Pat Hall, one of the girls who sang tonight, is on one of them, but again, I can't say much more. The idea behind the whole thing is to do what Apple tried to do but got fucked up on. I'll own it, but won't be on it. I just want to help – because no one gave me any help."

Are you listening, John Peel? *JULIE WEBB*

Surprised to be "still the superstud": Bolan at The Apollo, Glasgow, January 22, 1974, during T.Rex's Truck Off Tour

NME JUNE 15, 1974

YOU just know it's Marc Bolan you're talking to when you suddenly get dumped with a damn fool statement such as "I like crying – my eyes look good" and you carry on scrutinising the sound needle on your cassette with only the barest mental flinch.

You get used to this kind of thing when you're rapping with Mr B, even if a couple of years' worth of vinyl has gone through the mill since you last spoke with the elfman of the children's revolution.

"I like crying – my eyes look good." It's a Boley wisecrack y'see, accompanied by what the teeny mags might describe as a mischievous twinkle, but you can't help thinking that's a pretty rum line in humour the boy's got there and is it any wonder his intentions sometimes get misunderstood.

Poor old Marc: the press gets on my back, my marriage is on the skids, the taxman's on my tail, and why is everybody saying such nasty things about me?

Well, hold on – there's a bit of the truth hanging around in there somewhere, but let's just dangle around a bit first and come to that in the fullness of time.

First off, the offer of this interview came from Marc himself. He wasn't gonna be talking to anyone else on the music press, didn't want to talk to anyone else on *NME*. Weeeelll... being prone to flattery, feeling that maybe – just maybe – Marc had had one or two less-than-fair deals from this paper, and that he'd arrived in a pretty interesting position since all those interviews we'd done at the time of Tyrannosaurus and early T.Rex, I thought it might make a mildly scintillating piece of field study for your delectation.

But this is proving more difficult than I'd imagined. We're sitting in Marc's office in Bond Street – he sublets other floors of the building to the Floyd and Who/Stones tour organiser Pete Rudge – and what I'm faced with is a harder, altogether more cagey piece of teen property than I'd remembered from the distant past.

This man is not about to be pinned down, and with his publicist Keith Altham running his cassette recorder in harmony with my own, I sense that... weeeelll... I'm being watched with care at the very least.

So here begins the foxy two-step: How do you see your current position Marc?

"I don't take too much notice, honestly. I'm not that organised."

But you must be aware of the age group of your appeal?

"On that last tour, the kids were younger than they were in the peak of T.Rexstasy. That shocked me. Because I'd been reading all these comics [*heavy sarcasm*] and I'd begun to believe they'd be older and different and all that. But it was more T.Rexmania than it ever was before. What's happened is that they've got more used to it – screaming at the teenage idols. In fact I was the first one to bring it back, right?"

OK, Marc, well the last time we met was just prior to the T.Rex explosion and you were talking about competition. You surprised me by picking up a copy of *16* magazine and waving a photo of David Cassidy in front of my notebook. You'd obviously got the coming Cassidy scene sussed out better than the music press had at the time, and you were well aware of that area of...

"Yes, because I was very much in the ball game then. What we did over the last year was to creep out gracefully so that one can return, hopefully with the same impact, but with a little more credibility."

Have you gained that credibility?

"For me I have. For anyone else I don't give a shit. I mean, I know what I'm laying down.

"My backstop was always there... that I could say, if it all fell apart, 'Well balls, at least I've got the credibility of having done four albums with Tyrannosaurus Rex and people must know I'm a serious musician even though... Just like Dylan got caught up in that thing for a long time. I was caught up in something that was not bad and still is not bad. I still enjoy being a teenage idol. Funnily enough, I still am, which is quite amusing, y'know...

"But I suddenly thought, at that time, that if I had gone on continuously there was a possibility of ending up like 'Whatever happened to Gene Pitney?', y'know, or Roy Orbison. Suddenly they stopped."

You drew a parallel with Bob Dylan, as you've done on previous occasions. He was getting it in the neck from all quarters at one time but came through to restore his credibility. Is that how you see it for yourself?

"Well, I didn't break my neck. I didn't have that kind of excuse; that gave him an out.

"Without a shadow of a doubt I still have a public; fortunately it's exceedingly large. But it's having a public that matters to you – being wanted as an artist. It always fluctuates. I mean, [*George Harrison single*] "Bangla Desh" didn't do that well; the first couple of McCartney albums didn't do too well. My least biggest single was

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

a No 10. As long as it keeps on like that for the next 10 years, I don't give a shit."

Yet you're at the most fickle end of the rock scale.

"Well I wouldn't consider selling 37 million records over four years fickle. If I wasn't selling them any more I might agree. The point is – every two or three years, every year-and-a-half – to go out and make a classic [*single*], which is what makes you different from muzak. Don't you think I could go out and do 'Puppy Love' and be No 1 for five years?"

You talk about Dylan as a kind of crucifixion figure. Is that how you see yourself?

"I did at that time. It went from 'wow, it's great that Marc's made it' to 'teenybopper trash'. Totally nothing to do with the music."

He breaks off to recall a letter published in one of the music papers at the time of the "first really big tour", just after "Hot Love".

"The tour was a sensation, but on the second day I saw that paper and I really wanted to put a coat over my head and just run away, because it hurt me. Y'know, someone writes in really slagging it off and yet you can't get into the station for millions of kids. I was that gullible, but it only happens once like that.

"But that's what I was into at the time and you think, 'Wow, I don't have to take this. I don't have to go to school. I can just jump over the wall and run away?' I really was gonna split, y'know, run off, literally from the station, just disappear.

"Then I thought of all the kids who are digging it, and here's this one guy who's written a letter in, right, and you take it straight to heart."

OK, but let me take you back again. Now you indicated last time we met that the respect of other musicians was important to you, that at some time in the future you'd want that respect. Now it seems to me you haven't achieved that.

"I don't even want it."

Uh-huh. But you don't feel at some point that you'd like to...

"No... umm... that was two-and-a-half years ago. I think it's a defence; I didn't even mean it then. Everyone I know respects me as a man... friends... which is all I can ask from anyone."

Why do you think you incite such polarisation of attitudes?

"I don't know."

In the music business, I've known it to be quite vicious.

"I'm a cocky little bastard – probably a lot of it's to do with that – in their eyes. I don't think I am at all. I think I'm straightforward and reasonably honest."

But it does seem that every move you make goes further to incite that attitude?

"I can't agree with you because I don't see it that way. It doesn't mean to say that you're not right. But I can't imagine anything I do having much to do with anyone else. It's none of their business. Gimme an instance when I've incited anyone?"

I've thought it myself, 'What the hell is he up to?'

"When?"

Some of the ads for the singles, some of the appearances on *Top Of The Pops*. There are people who've wondered whether you're mentally unbalanced.

"They might be right; there are people who say the Earth is flat. I mean... umm... I won't disagree with any of it. I live my life according to how I live it. I can't change how I live my life. God touched me and touched my karma and allowed me to get my freedom in the way I wanted as a human being..."

Colouring my view of it has always been my idea of what your intentions were. From what you're now saying...

"I don't have any idea what my intentions were. I'm not that materialistic. I don't analyse anything."

What would you do if the audience suddenly ceased to exist?

"At this moment I would buy a villa in Spain. I'd spend three or four months learning to ride very well. I'd make a film immediately..."

Can you seriously say that you'd...

"I wouldn't talk if I wasn't serious..."

But it's unlikely that it would suddenly go, just like that.

"It's been known. In my case I would say it's highly unlikely, but it has been known."

Well, accepting that it was very unlikely to happen overnight, that you'd put out a single and it just would not sell a copy – say there was a minimal but noticeable anti-reaction to what you put out, could you seriously say at that point, right...

"Yes, I'd have no choice."

I wouldn't say you had no choice. If I noticed a drop in *NME* circulation I would think seriously about what I was doing and whether I should change what I'm doing.

"It might be a musical decline which I can rectify in five minutes. When I run into serious trouble I'll sit down and knock you out five hits – well easy, no problem."

So there you have it. We continue talking loosely, stuffing our faces with hamburgers fetched in from up the street, and when Marc says he has to go to look at a house he's thinking of buying I'm sitting there wondering whether I should make a second attempt to penetrate the armadillo shell or throw in the towel and acknowledge the No Entry signs.

"WHEN I RUN INTO TROUBLE I'LL SIT DOWN AND KNOCK YOU OUT FIVE HITS, NO PROBLEM"
MARC BOLAN

WELL here we are, some five/six weeks later, being greeted at the door of Marc's flat in St John's Wood by a well-structured black lady singer name of Gloria Jones, and I guess you all by now will have sussed that we're going in for a second crack.

Pretty soon there's some white wine a-flowing freely, some music on the jukebox, and Marc's stretching himself out on a settee talking 'bout being up all night in the studio but looking altogether less uptight about this whole interviewing malarkey than he was when last we met.

Thinking Zinc: Steve Currie, Davey Lutton, Gloria Jones and Bolan at Scorpio Studios, London, 1974

Can I ask you about the split with June?

"No. I don't want to talk about that, because there isn't one really – it's just a change."

OK, we'll change the subject. What about the last album, just released last time we met, and now just on its way out of the charts after a short appearance – having hardly set the sales lists on fire.

"Well it sold 75,000 already, so I mean... saleswise I'm very pleased with it. I don't go on charts. Compared with some records in the charts ..."

Now at this point I don't think anybody would've minded if Bolan had leaned into the mic and confided: "Yeah, I guess it flopped a bit but..."

But what? Well, that old line about not going on charts is not gonna get wound round me for one, and if Marc really believes all that "relative success" stuff then he's falling for Trap One of the Rock Star Ivory Tower Malaise.

Then we get into this awfully tortuous bit of dialogue over the fortunes of T.Rex in the States where I'm genuinely trying to offer solid reasons why bands like the Rex and Roxy and Slade find it more difficult to make a go of it in America, and

Marc keeps stopping me in my tracks with comments like: "Well, I haven't put any product out for a year" and "All I can say is, 'Get It On' sold a million."

Hang on a minute, Marc, I'm not trying to crucify you. What I'm trying to put forward is a more than acceptable bit of reasoning for the glitzier English bands finding it more difficult to cut it in boogie-land, and all you're doing is skootling around on the defensive – it just ain't necessary.

Let's try a different tack. Is he trying to widen the T.Rex area of appeal?

"I'm really not that calculating. I'm just a little kid. I mean, gimme a break. What you're asking me is market research."

But Marc, no-one ever needs to use market research. If I was to say to you that, from my experience, there is a substantial audience for T.Rex but that it stops dead at a certain point – and beyond that the anti-reactions are equally extreme.

"Can't you apply that to every artist though?"

There are few where the divisions are so extreme.

"I always felt with the Stones that it was like that; with The Beatles it was like that."

But even if you didn't like what the Stones were doing, you always accorded them a certain amount of respect. With T.Rex the division between those who like and those who don't like seems exceptionally acute.

"I'm not sure I agree, actually."

But if I said that in my experience this was so, would you argue with it?

"No, no, no, no, no. Many times I'll read, y'know, 'Typical Bolan crap lyrics – meaningless'. To me that guy is just an egg, man. If he can't see the emotion I put into it and the feeling, then it ain't written for him. As far as I'm concerned he's insensitive. As far as he's concerned I'm writing a load of crap. Why do they write in, the anti-letters?"

Usually in answer to a T.Rex fan.

"I always felt it was the nasties first, the nice ones afterwards."

Sometimes. More often the other way round.

"Is it? I never read letters pages. I'm sure you write them all anyway. No all right, you couldn't make them up – it would be impossible. Errh... I dig 'em. I've always wanted to write back, because they get on such weird trips.

"I suppose I nark people for some reason. Like Jagger always worked at narking the older people. I don't work at narking anybody. I nark 'em anyway.

"Like it's very hard to be asked questions like why people think you're a cocky little nark. It's more important to me that people think I'm a groove. I mean, I know what's bad in me; I know my shortcomings and my good points. I mean, I can't say why Hitler killed all those millions of people – and he had a dog, didn't he, he was very nice to it – but I mean, I tend to be... used to be... far too open and honest with the press. And everyone thought I was putting them on.

"I tend to be much harder to talk to, and even the way you are approaching talking to me is much harder than we used to do. Purely because nobody ever believed what I was saying."

So you've come to terms with not...

"With being evasive."

...With being evasive, right?

"Yeah, only because people never believed me. Whatever anyone says, you can be made to sound a real creep. If it's put in the right way you don't mind if you come out a creep, as long as the personality comes through.

"With rock'n'roll papers, I've always found that when you start getting serious and talking very serious it always sounds rubbish – sounds as if you've suddenly gone all 'Power to the People'."

All right, but is there any point in us indulging in this kind of exchange when you've predestined that you're gonna thwart me from seeing beyond a certain limit? I mean, what do you want to talk about?

"Everything. I think the country's screwed up. There's a lot of things I'm into... movies I want to see... There's so much going down... I really like that Ann Peebles record. There are lots of things I'm disappointed in, lots of things I like. I'm very pleased with the Teac I've got. You write that down – it's just a few words, y'know, means nothing.

"I'm pretty concerned with what's happening to this country at the moment. It's worrying the

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

shit out of me 'cause I really care about it. Written down, that's gonna look really stupid. But I mean, that's much more important than going to a rock show. There's a whole world out there." *NICK LOGAN*

MELODY MAKER | NOVEMBER 30, 1974

A MYSTERIOUS lack of bubble seems to be affecting Master Marc Bolan's latest offering, the "Zip Gun Boogie", as it is known to those who avidly follow the doings of our senior pop celebrities.

Just the other day I inquired: "How's Marc Bolan doing in the chart?" The answer was: "It's bubbling under – just." And yet everyone can remember the time when Marc Bolan dominated the chart with a massive stream of hits.

It remains to be seen what will be the fate of the "Zip Gun Boogie", and indeed the long-playing disc from which it is taken, and due for release 'ere long. But whatever the reaction to Bolan at home, he can rest assured that in foreign climes the magic has not entirely waned. And our erstwhile imp, now a business-like, hard-working professional, has been slogging around America on a tour he concedes is "low-keyed", but shows that there is fire in the curvaceous Bolan belly, yet.

After a series of missed appointments, replaced receiver incidents and other mishaps, Marc finally got through to Fleet Street from Detroit this week, via the undersea cable, so painstakingly laid by the sailors of the General Post Office in the early part of the century.

I have known Marc in many moods, from starry-eyed romantic to champagne-drenched superstar, but now he is serious, composed, and to the point, perhaps the result of being out there on his own, now that he has parted company from wife June, who guided him through the madness of the early years.

Nevertheless, he was bright and cheerful enough, having just completed some 40 gigs in seven weeks. "It's been going great," said Marc, and he seemed fairly convinced.

"I've been away from Britain for longer than the tour though. About six months. It's the old tax routine, I'm afraid. Yes, I've been forced away from home, and I've got a penthouse now in Monaco."

"It's a drag to have to leave England, but I hope I'll be able to come back soon."

Hadn't Marc decided long ago to give up touring?

"Well sort of, but I just wanted to play again, so I took a band over to LA and recorded an album there which will be released in England after Christmas."

"The album's called 'Zip Gun Boogie', but it won't be out before Christmas because it'll just get lost otherwise.

Bolan: slogging around the US on a "low-keyed" tour, 1973

"We cut the album very quickly because the band is so tight now after all the work. We've been working hard, y'know, touring the big stadiums, and right now I'm trying to see if we can play in England in February. I've got Steve and Mickey with me still, and Dino Dines on organ, and Gloria Jones on vocals. We just did another 10 tracks in Chicago that could be our next album."

Why Zip Gun, by the way?

"Oh, don't you remember those? A friend of mine showed me an old zip gun that the juvenile delinquents used to carry, made with car radio aerials and a piece of elastic. No – I'm not getting into violence, just the leather jackets!"

"I'M HOPING TO MAKE A FILM WITH DAVID BOWIE. I'LL BE DIRECTING AND HE'LL BE WRITING THE SCRIPT"
MARC BOLAN

As befits a resident of Monaco, Prince Bolan will be proceeding on a Grand Tour of Europe in the spring, covering France, Germany and Shflt. And that, in case you are wondering, is the result of a sudden burst of static. Shflt could well be Switzerland, but all will be made clear – later on.

Meanwhile, Marc is busy planning another motion picture epic. "Next year I'm hoping to make a film with David Bowie. I'll be directing and he'll be writing the script."

"I've been hanging out a lot with him lately, and we'd like to do a concert together, just the two of us with acoustic guitars, to recreate the atmosphere of the old days."

"We did a tour of England together, years ago. The film will be a science-fiction story, and we'll probably write it between us. We really want to work together. Yeah, David's fine. He's pretty 'up' at the moment, like me, working on the road."

The last time we met had been in Marc's candlelit, freezing office during the three-day week. It might just have had something to do with his desire to live in the sunny South of France, and work in the even sunnier California.

But he'll be back soon, powered by that irrepressible Bolan energy, and as Marc said: "I want to be everywhere!"

CHRIS WELCH

STEVE MORLEY/REDFERNS

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LIGHT OF LOVE

RELEASED | AUGUST 1974

Whatever happened to the American dream? Bolan courts the fickle mistress of the USA, and barely reaches first base.

BY TERRY STAUNTON

BEFORE an artist is eligible for the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, a period of 25 years has to have elapsed since they released their first recording. The fact that T.Rex's induction didn't come until an online ceremony in November 2020, a full 50 years (almost to the day) since "Ride A White Swan" began its climb to the higher reaches of the UK charts, is perhaps a pointer to the struggle Marc Bolan faced to make a lasting impact in America, forever the world's biggest music market.

The spring of 1972 seemed full of promise for a British invasion of sorts, led by Bolan and close friends with whom he regularly rubbed shoulders back home on *Top Of The Pops*. Elton John was about to score his first No 1 album with *Honky Château*, and Rod Stewart's *Never A Dull Moment* consolidated his record-breaking feat of the previous year, when "Maggie May" and its parent LP *Every Picture Tells A Story* made him the first act to stand atop both the singles and albums chart in the UK and US in the same week.

T.Rex's transatlantic success was more modest, but a Top 10 showing for "Bang A Gong" ("Get It On" hastily retitled to avoid confusion with a hit of the same name from the previous year by Massachusetts-based jazz rockers Chase) seemed like a solid first step. The tricky part was following it up, and after "Telegram Sam" stalled at 67 and *The Slider* peaked at 17, Bolan would never again trouble any of *Billboard* magazine's Top 100 listings. By '74 his US label Reprise had opted not to release the *Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow* album and quietly dropped him from the roster.

It coincided with his star status waning in the UK and a significant change in the studio, with longtime confidant Tony Visconti vacating the producer's chair. There was something sadly prescient about the words Bolan had sung on the year's comparatively under-performing single: "*Whatever happened to the teenage dream?*"

Nonetheless, "Teenage Dream" was one of three *Zinc Alloy...* tracks salvaged to reboot Bolan's quest for US recognition on *Light Of Love*, his debut long-player with music mogul Neil Bogart's new company Casablanca, where T.Rex joined a rock-oriented stable that also included Kiss and pioneering all-female outfit Fanny (the label would subsequently alter course and establish itself as a big noise in the disco market). Ever the cocksure self-publicist, Marc played up the changes as part of a master plan.

"In the past T.Rex has been ahead of its time in America," he suggested to *Circus* magazine shortly after the album's release. "It's just the right time for us now, because we have the credibility of not being over-exposed. We never got stuck in that glam rock glitter bag fortunately; I'm in the nice position of almost being able to recap and come on like a fresh face."

There is a temptation to read Bolan's bullish assessment of "not being over-exposed" as something akin to the scene in *This Is Spinal Tap* where the fading Brit rockers' manager Ian Faith talks about the band's appeal "becoming more selective", ie, a reluctance to acknowledge the laws of diminishing returns. But there was also savvy thinking behind the choice of studio to record the eight new tracks to add to the trio lifted from *Zinc Alloy...*; Music Recorders Inc in Hollywood was just a stone's throw from DJ Rodney Bingenheimer's cult-ish English Disco club on Sunset Boulevard, a tiny pocket of the US where 45s by the Brit glam cognoscenti (Slade, Sweet et al) filled the dancefloor.

It may have acted as a confidence-booster, although bygone hook-happy

LIGHT OF LOVE

TRACKMARKS

1. Light Of Love ★★★★
2. Solid Baby ★★★★
3. Precious Star ★★
4. Token Of My Love ★★★
5. Space Boss ★★★
6. Think Zinc ★★★
7. Till Dawn ★★★
8. Teenage Dream ★★★★
9. Girl In The Thunderbolt Suit ★★
10. Explosive Mouth ★★★
11. Venus Loon ★★★

Label: Casablanca (US)
Produced by: Marc Bolan
Recorded at: Musicland Studios, Munich; Music Recorders Inc Studios, Hollywood
Personnel: Marc Bolan (guitars, vocals), Steve Currie (bass), Mickey Finn (percussion, backing vocals), Davey Lutton (drums), Bill Legend (drums), Paul Fenton (drums), Gloria Jones (clavinet, backing vocals), David Katz (string arrangements)
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 205

toe-tappers like "Hot Love" or "Metal Guru" don't particularly inform the contents of *Light Of Love*. Here Bolan dips his toe instead into a pool of strutting funk ("Space Boss", "Precious Star", arguably the influence of soul singer girlfriend Gloria Jones) and grinding garage rock ("Solid Baby", "Think Zinc").

HERE BOLAN DIPS HIS TOE INTO A POOL OF STRUTTING FUNK AND GRINDING GARAGE ROCK

All too often, though, the impression is of a succession of solid but unspectacular riffs in search of an actual song. Many reviewers suggested that Bolan's decision to self-produce was short-sighted, suspecting that Tony Visconti might have had an even greater hand than first assumed in fashioning the playground chant-like boogies of yore into tangible, radio-friendly winners. Certainly, the muddy mixes lack the sonic light and shade of past triumphs, sounding for the large part like hurried demo works-in-progress.

The Hollywood tracks are also found wanting when held up against their *Zinc Alloy*... neighbours, especially the decadent grandeur of "Teenage Dream" and the lip-curling sleaze of "Explosive Mouth", the latter containing echoes of the halcyon days of *The Slider*.

Less than a month after *Light Of Love* was released to a resounding lack of fanfare (and a "who's-even-counting?" chart placing of 205), Visconti weighed in on what was going wrong in Bolan's world.

"Marc will come up with a great song, say that it's too good to be one song and then try to split it into three," he told *Disc* magazine in the UK. "Marc was always rough; he knew all of six guitar chords – and still does – but he used to be super-artistic in the way he used them. Everything we did [*together*] was supposed to be leading up to this magnificent *Tommy*-like album, 'Children Of Rarn', but it never happened. The quality of his writing went down and down.

"Unfortunately we don't speak to each other these days. I'd love to sit down and talk to him, but he wouldn't take advice from anyone."

Bolan himself appeared to lose faith in *Light Of Love* fairly quickly, with nothing from the album featuring in T.Rex's seven-song setlist when they toured the US in the autumn of '74, opening for Blue Öyster Cult. It was time to fly home and reconfigure the record for a UK market, where his diamond star halo was looking ever more tarnished.

BOLAN'S ZIP GUN

RELEASED | FEBRUARY 16, 1975

Misfiring in all directions, Bolan's 10th album still had some solid gold funk bullets in the chamber. BY JASON ANDERSON

IN the final months of 1974, Marc Bolan was desperately clinging to fame after a string of failures. It was, therefore, not the best decision to use a zip gun as the central image in a would-be comeback single.

He no doubt intended the hard-boiled coinage to sound swift, cool and deadly as he repeated it again and again in "Zip Gun Boogie", released in November of 1974 as T.Rex's first UK single since "Light Of Love" stalled at No 22 in July. What he may not have understood was that zip guns were notoriously unreliable for the underworld types who brandished them back in the days of zoot suits and gumshoes. Indeed, these handmade pistols were less likely to get the job done than to blow up in your hand and cost you a finger or two.

A psychoanalyst might read this as an unconscious act of self-sabotage. A more superstitious sort may believe Bolan jinxed himself. Then again, the fact that "Zip Gun Boogie" became the first T.Rex single not to crack the UK Top 40 is more a reflection of its mediocrity. A listless piece of choogling that ground on for as long as nine minutes during 1974's live shows in the US and Canada, it must've seemed like the epitome of T.Rex's faded glory to their dwindling fanbase. As one of only three songs on T.Rex's forthcoming album that had not been released on its US-only counterpart *Light Of Love*, it was also unlikely to inspire interest in music that had essentially been spurned by audiences once already.

The single's rejection was crushing for Bolan, who'd been disheartened by the poor reception to *Light Of Love* and the tour that proved to be T.Rex's final bid for Stateside success. But as he was so apt to do with the press, he put a rosier spin on this humiliation when speaking with the *Record & Popswop Mirror* in February, blaming the single's woes on his inability to properly promote it while also noting that singles by John Lennon and Stevie Wonder misfired at the same time. "At least I flopped in good company," he said.

He took the opportunity to gamely hype *Bolan's Zip Gun*, the album that was about to arrive on store shelves, where it would largely stay before moving on to the bargain bins, not once cracking the charts in the interim. "It's definitely the nearest thing I've done to *Electric Warrior*," he claimed. "It's very commercial." As the fate of *Bolan's Zip Gun* became clear, Bolan changed his tune. Echoing the critics who savaged it, he described T.Rex's 10th studio album as "the worst record I made" and "completely over-produced". (Bolan only had himself to blame for the latter issue, having jettisoned Tony Visconti and taken over production duties himself.)

Yet Bolan was off the mark in both sets of opinions, as anyone who flipped over "Zip Gun Boogie" to discover the churning glam-funk of "Space Boss" may have realised. Just as the most radical sounds on Bolan's *Zip Gun* bear little resemblance to T.Rex's greatest triumph, the best of it is also rawer and wilder than just about anything else he recorded. From the ecstatic "Light Of Love" through the swaggering "Solid Baby" and "Space Boss" to the two other new additions – the endearingly over-the-top "I Really Love You Babe" and the nimbler "Golden Belt" – Bolan makes a number of stark departures from the T.Rex template that felt so worn-out on "Zip Gun Boogie". Had he received a more encouraging reception for his increasing immersion in soul and funk – as facilitated by new girlfriend Gloria Jones, whose backup vocals and Clavinet supply so much of the fuel here – Bolan might have stood a better chance of successfully reinventing T.Rex for the decade's latter half. At the very least, he may have sussed out how to make a better disco single than the dire "Dreamy Lady" a year later.

Indeed, Bolan's creative dilemma through this period may have less to do with zip guns and more to do with boogie. As one of the prime architects of glam rock's big beat, Bolan knew full well how to construct a proper groover. And with their metronomic pace, the four-on-the-floor rhythms of the emergent disco sound were already a lingua franca to many of the stars who ascended through

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Maybe 'Golden Belt' should have been released as the single, since the aim of a performance like this must be to wheedle Marc back into the hearts of his former 13-year-old adorers."
KATE PHILLIPS, NME, MARCH 22, 1975

"The music here is not so bad. 'Light Of Love' is a good riff and Bolan can still boogie on tunes like 'Precious Star', based on the kind of hand-clapping pop soul of the '60s New York groups."
CHRIS WELCH, MELODY MAKER, MAY 24, 1975

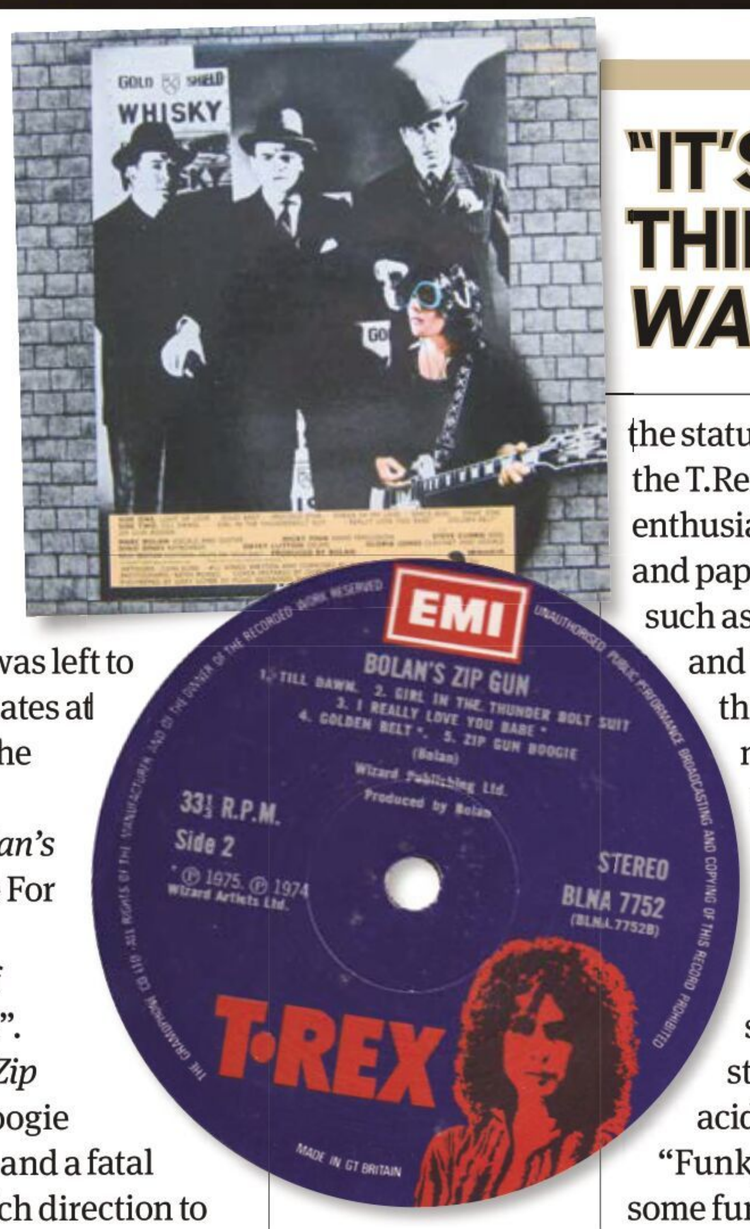
BOLAN'S ZIP GUN

TRACKMARKS

1. Light Of Love ★★★★
2. Solid Baby ★★★★
3. Precious Star ★★
4. Token Of My Love ★★★
5. Space Boss ★★★
6. Think Zinc ★★★★
7. Till Dawn ★★★
8. Gil In The Thunderbolt Suit ★★
9. I Really Love You Babe ★★★
10. Golden Belt ★★★
11. Zip Gun Boogie ★★

Label: T.Rex
Produced by: Marc Bolan
Recorded at: MRI Studios, Hollywood
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitars, DMS), Mickey Finn (hand percussion), Dino Dines (keyboards), Gloria Jones (backing vocals, clavinet), Steve Currie (bass guitar), Harry Nilsson (backing vocals), Davy Lutton (drums), Paul Fenton (drums), Bill Legend (drums)
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

glam. Hits like Gary Glitter's "Rock And Roll Part 2" and David Essex's "Rock On" heralded dancefloor fillers like Roxy Music's "Love Is The Drug", which arrived in the autumn of 1975, or David Bowie's "Fame", which became the first US No 1 for Bolan's increasingly distant contemporary around the same time. It was left to KISS – Bolan's old labelmates at Casablanca – to achieve the glam-disco apotheosis suggested by much of *Bolan's Zip Gun* with "I Was Made For Loving You" and Ace Frehley's punchy cover of Hello's "New York Groove".



In that respect, *Bolan's Zip Gun* captures a crisis of boogie confidence for its creator, and a fatal indecisiveness about which direction to go. Though he may have claimed during the album's promotion that T.Rex no longer existed as a band (with stalwarts like bassist Steve Currie being demoted to the status of sessioneer), he still felt tied to the T.Rex strut of yore despite the lack of enthusiasm palpable in "Zip Gun Boogie" and paper-thin *Light Of Love* holdovers such as "Girl In The Thunderbolt Suit" and "Precious Star". It's no wonder that he and Jones sound so much more engaged by the newer, chunkier kind of glam that emerges in the double-drummer thunderdome of "Solid Baby". Better still is "Think Zinc", a rumbling berserker whose squalls of Mellotron-generated strings and guitar lend it the same acid-funk fury as Funkadelic's "Funky Dollar Bill". They also have some fun with "Token Of My Love", a '50s pastiche that toys with the tune of "Sea Of Love" over a decade before Robert Plant's Honeydrippers had a go.

Unfortunately, many of the ideas are hampered by mixes that lack the clarity and focus Visconti might have brought to the proceedings. The album's sonic shortcomings exacerbate the feeling that Bolan – his creative vision impaired by alcohol and cocaine – has little idea how to marshal his ideas into anything coherent. Though few would notice at the time, he gets a little closer to meeting his funk ambitions on Gloria Jones' *Vixen* LP, released the following year.

Tellingly, the T.Rex boogie master would soon lose command even of his favourite word, as the likes of KC & The Sunshine Band and Heatwave redefined it for a new audience. If he hadn't died just a few months before the Bee Gees and *Saturday Night Fever* changed the pop landscape (much as he had at the decade's onset), the fiercest grooves in *Bolan's Zip Gun* suggest he may have taken his rightful place in the boogie wonderland to come.

"IT'S DEFINITELY THE NEAREST THING I'VE DONE TO *ELECTRIC WARRIOR*" MARC BOLAN

"I'M THE BIGGEST BULLSHITTER OF ALL TIME"

After a period of self-reflection ("There was a definite period when it wasn't happening," he says), **MARC BOLAN** returns with his latest range of reinventions. Revitalised rocker. Celebrity interviewer. And most impressively, father. "It's not that I wanted a Bolan dynasty," he tells **CHRIS WELCH**, "but I wanted someone to teach."

MELODY MAKER | OCTOBER 25, 1975

MARC BOLAN lay on his star on the studio floor. "Somebody should nail him down," observed someone dispassionately. Acid comments and cynicism are never far from Bolan. But nobody will ever manage to nail Bolan down. He's too full of energy and surprises. The bubbling bumptious young veteran has ridden his star for a remarkable five years now since the heady days when "Ride A White Swan" elevated the underground mascot to superstar status.

For two years, his career has remained relatively dormant, during which time his marriage to June Child has broken up and he's begun his romance with the beautiful American singer Gloria Jones. Now Gloria and Marc are parents, with the infant Rolan Bolan uttering his first distinctive vocals.

Marc was at London Weekend TV's *Supersonic*, rehearsing for his second appearance on the show, directed by Mike Mansfield, that has already drawn favourable comparison with the old *Ready, Steady, Go!*. The week before, he had been drenched in foam and smoke bubbles as he sang his latest single, "Dreamy Lady".

In the cramped dressing room before his run-through, we talked – or rather, Marc talked – with all his old animation and energy. He threw in outrageous comparisons between himself and John McLaughlin, philosophised, bullied, joked, and then occasionally let his stream of thoughts and words die down, to reveal the essential intelligence and sensitivity beneath.

Bolan is usually ahead of most people in word, thought and deed. He anticipates and knows what people are about to say to him. He can pay for his awareness by going over the top. But it was the energy and ego of Bolan, Bowie, Baker, Lennon, Townshend and Davies that gave us the 1960s and rock.

Marc is planning to tour again in 1976. And he promises that the band will be better and that his music will be better. And even in an age of uncertainties, the fans will be there, and Bolan will boogie once more.

But first, Bolan – a father?

"Yeah – I delivered the baby myself. I was a bit nervous about it, but it just sort of popped out. In a way it was an anticlimax because it was a week late. I was doing my first *Supersonic* recording session, and I had a call to say Gloria was in labour. I went home and got caught in the rush hour, and then by the time I got to the hospital it had already started. The baby let out a few yells, and suddenly there was this big soul voice – 'Oh, yeah!'" Marc and Gloria dissolved into laughter.

"Man it was great. Now I'm a midwife," said Bolan. "No, it's great having a kid. It's changed my whole life. You see, I don't feel like I'm a father. I feel like his brother. 'Cos you know, I'm not a dad type! I never think much about dads. My mum was my person, the one I related to, and I've always loved her.

"Rolan is the same sign as me. He was born four days before my birthday. I had his horoscope read and it's exactly the same as me. Scary? My birthday is September 30 and he came on the 26. It has changed me a lot.

"It gets very empty being a rock star. I was beginning to feel very unfulfilled over the last year or so, even though there was the relationship with Gloria, and I love her very much.

"It's not that I wanted a Bolan dynasty, but I wanted someone to teach, and learn from. Because you can learn from kids. They come out so pure. And we're soiled. We're soiled goods.

"The day I found out there was a baby due. I was scared of it, because of a responsibility I'd never had. Business I can handle. Rock'n'roll – easy, you can normally do something about that. But this poor little tyke, well, I'm going to be totally responsible."

So where is he now?

"With a nurse. But it's the first time Gloria has left him. I'd bring him here, but it's too early. Later on he'll go everywhere with me."

How will young Rolan cope with being caught up in a rock'n'roll family?

SHUTTERSTOCK

"It gets very empty being a rock star": Bolan appears on *Rock On With 45*, to perform "New York City", July 24, 1975

"I dunno. What do you think? I think it will be a good thing. I'd like to have been brought up in that situation. There will be a whole generation of rock and roll kids in that situation.

"There's Zowie Bowie, and Keith Richards' kids... they're all gonna get together. Rod will probably have some kids. They'll grow up and take over."

Bolan doesn't think parenthood will interfere with his career. In fact, it may help.

"Oh, more so – there's a reason to do it. With any artist you have ups and downs, and that's often because there is no motive for it.

"The initial motive is – 'I wanna be a star', and then you become a star, and nobody actually tells you what happens after you become famous, about how you get crucified 95 times a week.

"You don't realise what's happening to you at first because you're on the road all the time, and having six No 1 hits.

"For the last two years I've not been on the road, and have had time to reflect, and think about what I'm doing. It gets disconcerting. A lot of things I did, I could have done better.

"Dylan said a great thing just after his accident. He said how he was on an Australian tour and one night he was sitting at his typewriter, and suddenly he had no idea why he was typing and got very scared and felt thousands of invisible people were pushing him against the wall.

"And when you've got deadlines every day, not just for gigs, but so many things, well booze and drugs don't help. That wasn't my problem. My problem was loneliness.

"That's why my marriage broke up. When I met Gloria, it solved my problem of loneliness, because she can really live with a musician.

"You can cook with someone like that. And also, she's a better singer than me! She has also had hit records of her own and had done it all. It was a big chance for me to be with someone like that and I didn't feel lonely, and didn't feel the need to put on a façade."

Bolan has been through a lot of changes in the years since the first success.

"I'm still going through changes. The changes don't stop. The difference is how I handle them. I put my head through a brick wall once. I didn't throw TVs out of windows, but I used to smash mirrors all the time. Oh yeah, the old ultra-violence.

"My first experience of that which upset me was that first Les Paul of mine, you remember? I smashed it up. It was just after 'Hot Love' and I'd done a disastrous American tour; I had no reason to go there in the first place. I'd only been playing electric guitar for about four weeks, and I was off to America playing on the same bills as Mountain and Grateful Dead – I mean COME ON. They needed me there – right?

"What saved me was being still No 1 when I came back to England, because it went for nine weeks. But in America I was so dejected and I threw that Les Paul across the stage, and as I watched it go through the air I thought, 'You can't do that to a delicate instrument.'

"And the neck went" – Marc made an expressive noise of a valuable guitar snapping. "I'd broken the most precious thing I had. It was unnecessary – it was punishing myself. Total frustration. But six years later, I'm still happening. Check it out, and you'll see.

"I did those four crazy ballroom gigs in England a couple of months ago, with no promotion, just to see how things were.

"Would they just sit there and look at me? I didn't know. And they sold out, and the response was amazing, with no publicity. The local kids just turned out. And it went down well. But it could have bombed, and we wanted to bomb in secret! There was no way I was going to do nine days at the Albert Hall. No theatrics, just a five-piece band."

Didn't Marc feel somewhat rusty after his long lay-off?

"No, because I've been recording. I cut four albums. There's one with Gloria coming out, and one with her brother. Her brother – no, not my brother. Harry – yes, he's still driving buses, bless him. But I've been working, boy! Got a Christmas single out in four weeks' time. But the singles are good now. There was a definite period when it wasn't happening.

"It all got to be a damp squib. I'd become a money-making machine and that was very obvious, and I was putting my impetus into things other than T.Rex.

"I wasn't sure if I wanted T.Rex to continue. But I want the deejays to say T.Rex now because I want to include the boys as a group. There was a lot of confusion with Mickey Finn leaving. He was a partner, right, at the beginning, but towards the end the musicianship I wanted changed.

"I was working with Gloria, and Motown bass players, and Bobbye Hall Porter, a great West Coast conga player. I wanted to get away from the teenybopper thing, because I was getting out with Donny and David..."

BUT that had always been a schizophrenic part of Bolan, surely? "Yeah, but that's happened to a lot of people, like Bowie, because we have a history. What you have to evaluate is when people talk about you in the same breath as 'Puppy Love'. Now that's when I get offended.

"I always think most pop stars last for five years, and I'm into my sixth, which means I'll be OK for another 10. I've had my lean period.

"Last year was very bad for me. It was bad for all Librans. The records I had were very below par. The records were very run-out, energy-wise. And so were Lennon's, and he's another Libran.

"My new album is amazing. I spent a hundred grand on it, and it's called *Futuristic Dragon*. I've cut another album since then, which will be the one after. I'm back into that natural speed [*Marc snapped his fingers furiously*] of wanting to play and do things.

"After *Tanx* the band was stale, but there was a product commitment and I got caught in the grind of it. I had to have two albums a year and five singles, and didn't want to play at all on *Zinc Alloy*, which was very patchy."

What did Marc do during his lay-off period? Did he develop a domestic life – or just vegetate?

"No," said Marc, slowing down from a burst of verbal speed. "There was never a time when I wasn't working. I worked on an album with Pat Hall, the singer Gloria worked with, and unfortunately it went crazy on us. But I spent six months recording that, so I was always doing something. I was editing down *Born To Boogie* for the States, experimenting with video.

"And I even took acting and tap-dancing lessons for a while. Played a lot of guitar with friends in LA. Gloria introduced me to a whole different breed of musicians."

Where had Marc been living these past few years?

"All over the place."

Could Gloria keep up with him?

"So far."

Didn't he ever feel like putting down some roots in one place?

"Yes I do. Have to now we've got a kid. I'm looking for a house here. Somewhere like Kingston, not too far out of town. I don't want to get it together in the country. But I'm going to keep the house in LA, which Bowie is in at the moment."

A mansion?

"Oh, well, there's a swimming pool, and eight bedrooms. You know me, I don't live cheap." He snapped his fingers a few more times, and there was more laughter.

"Monte Carlo? That was the first place I got shipped to when I was a tax exile. It was great for about four weeks. I made a mistake in buying a big penthouse and shipping all my gear out there.

"I was there for four months, with no friends there, nothing to stimulate me. I nearly went

"Now I'm a midwife": Marc with Gloria Jones and their newborn son Rolan, October 2, 1975

JOHN DOWNING/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Snow time: performing "Dreamy Lady" on the *Supersonic* TV show, October 25, 1975

crazy and became a cognac freak and put on about two stone through eating."

Wasn't being fat a sign of contentment? His eyes twinkled and his face broke into the famous Bolan grin.

"Contentment? No, man, it was a sign of being drunk. I was going mad with boredom. But looking back, even at the lowest ebb of my career it would be a high for most people, and I realised I was taking too much for granted. When you only get to 25 in the chart with a record – that is not the end of the world. When I got to 28 with 'Debora' I was knocked out.

"So now I'm just pleased to have the chance to make records at all. I've had six straight No 1s, maybe more, and four No 2s – doesn't this sound terrible?

"It's like *Performance*, when James Fox as Turner says Jagger was 'never that big'. And the little girl says, 'Well, he had one No 1, two No 2s and a No 3.'

"I've only ever had one real flop, and that was 'Zip Gun Boogie'. Nobody pounced on me because they had been predicting my downfall for so long. I remember doing Colston Hall in Bristol, just before '...White Swan' broke, and a guy wrote. 'This is the first nail in Bolan's coffin.'

"I'd kicked Mickey or something, because he had a bad hand and couldn't play, and called him a silly bunt on stage. 'You bunt,' I said, 'you silly bunt.' And the week after we were in the Top 10. My coffin must have a lot of fucking nails. But I don't feel victimised any more, because it happens to everyone. What matters to me are my friends, and other musicians."

HE has made a considerable impression with his new role as TV interviewer on ITV's *Today* show, chatting to such peers and fellow rockers as John Mayall.

Was Boley to become the Parkinson of Rock, or indeed, the Russell Harty of Roll?

"It's been fun and good for me after being very laidback and Harry Nilsson.

"I want to do Gary Glitter next. It's fun doing interviews because they can't bullshit me, because I'm the biggest bullshitter of all time. And I don't want to be the star of it.

"They are the stars, talking to the public about their problems, and I can relate to them from experience.

"We've got only six minutes, but we keep it topical, and it won't be necessarily music-business people. I'm doing Stan Lee of Marvel Comics. Anyone who invents Spider-Man has got to be interesting."

Could Marc sees himself hosting his own chat show?

"I've been offered, because it's gone down well. But I can't commit myself yet. Ideas have been thrown at me, put it that way.

"But I'm not prepared for it yet. I'm still a rock'n'roller, and I'm doing a tour in January. And I want to play England like I've never done before. Saturation. Nobody knows about it yet, so you're the first to know. The album will be out at the same time, and the set-piece will be a huge, futuristic dragon, and I'll appear out of the mouth.

"MOST POP STARS LAST FOR FIVE YEARS, AND I'M INTO MY SIXTH... I'LL BE OK FOR ANOTHER 10"

MARC BOLAN

"Apart from that, it'll be down-home rock. Very basic, but I'll be using two drummers again, and four synthesisers, and I'm auditioning for another guitar player.

"Gloria will be singing, and a guy called Tyrone, who was in the Majestics, and Richard Jones. It'll be like T.Rex should have sounded four years ago, and like it didn't in *Born To Boogie*."

He threw in the last remark with that purely East End trick of laughing ruefully at himself that reminded me of Pete Townshend or Ronnie Lane. A glimpse of the real Bolan, behind the finger-snapping, fast-talking hipster. And beneath the bursts of boastfulness, a humorist and realist.

"The time has come now where I don't give a monkey's, I shall just do what I want. I'd like to get Margaret Thatcher on TV and interview her. We can really link up rock'n'roll to what's going on in the world: drug problems, violence, the realities.

"What are the realities of rock? All the money – it's only paper. All the cars have been written off. All the guitars have been smashed. The dream has gone. And now it's a huge medium, an audio-visual art, from *Tommy* to whatever.

"The movie I was going to do? I'm still signed for it, but they couldn't get the money up. They were only a million short. But it's a great script, and it'll be done. It's about a psychotic murderer. But It's more important for me to be back on the map musically."

It was time for Bolan to quit the sanctuary of his dressing room for the hard stares and harsh lights of the studio.

"Mike Mansfield is like Jack Good in the old days. He's prepared to take a chance and cares about the artists. He's like me, a pleasantly arrogant person."

Having seen Ginger Baker on tour, Arthur Brown and Cathy McGowan on *Supersonic*, and Chris Farlowe back with "Out Of Time", it seemed as if the stalwarts of the '60s were back, wreaking vengeance.

"Yeah, it seems like it. And if there is a new Marc Bolan, I haven't seen him."

ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

T. REX

FUTURISTIC DRAGON

RELEASED | JANUARY 30, 1976

Begone, foul glam! A rejuvenated Bolan recasts himself as chameleon, trying on disco, plastic soul and future-mythic rock.

BY SHARON O'CONNELL

THE blows delivered by the first six months of 1975 alone – the failure of his lacklustre *Bolan's Zip Gun* to make a mark, the weight gained during his lengthy sabbatical in LA and Monaco and the scrapping of plans for not just one, but two conceptual operas – could have had a devastating professional and personal effect on the self-described "gold galactic raver". Additionally, the chart presence of The Glitter Band, Mud, Bay City Rollers and David Essex had the potential to rub salt into already tender wounds. But by July of that year, T.Rex had sprung back into the UK Top 20 with "New York City", the first release from 1976's *Futuristic Dragon*.

It was T.Rex's 11th album and served several purposes: helping Bolan shed more of his typecasting as the originator of glam rock (a process begun with *Bolan's Zip Gun*); killing off any residual, ignominious associations with the teen-pop likes of David Cassidy and Donny Osmond; and settling him into his latter-day role as a sparky (re)inventer. At the time of its release, though, T.Rextasy was very much a spent force, which meant it just scraped into the bottom of the UK Top 50 and wasn't issued in the US at all. Yet as the penultimate album of his career *Futuristic Dragon* is far from a dying whimper, and in hindsight it strikes a poignant note as the sound of Bolan getting back into the game, with some gusto.

It fronts like a concept album – George Underwood's cover illustration, an image of Bolan armed with a lance and riding across the sky on what looks like a pterodactyl, with a full moon behind him, certainly suggests one – but aside from the lyrics to the titular introduction and the name of the sole instrumental track, there's nothing to it. Instead, there's a parade of random mythic characters that includes Zeus, Michael Mouse (surely a cheeky nod to old rival Bowie's "Life On Mars"), King Kong, a "grinning Cyclopean pagan" and Delilah, all picked for their imagistic potential rather than narrative use.

Recorded in LA, Chicago and London, the 13 songs see Bolan making his first dip into disco (most obviously with the strings-boosted "My Little Baby" and "Casual Agent", less so with "Ride My Wheels") while flexing more of the plastic-soul muscle exercised on his previous album (via "Sensation Boulevard" and the torch-y "Dawn Storm") and cutting it with his usual deep-grooved boogie ("Jupiter Liar", "Chrome Sitar" and "New York City").

But he and his band – the same lineup that served on *Bolan's Zip Gun* – play it far from straight. "Casual Agent" has a quasi-Latin flavour; "Dawn Storm" is unexpectedly decked out with Christmas bells and "Chrome Sitar"... well, the clue is in the title. With its unashamed biting of Steely Dan's style, "Ride My Wheels" sails perilously close to pastiche but is redeemed by its strangely appealing mix of the galumphing and glassily streamlined. (History provided a sweet postscript to Bolan's fanboy gesture earlier this year, when Donald Fagen popped up as a guest on the Hal Willner-steered tribute album, *AngelHeaded Hipster*.) There's also a nod to Elton John, channelled via doo-wop on the album's second single "Dreamy Lady" (credited to "T.Rex Disco Party") and, on the pedestrian "Sensation Boulevard", to soul. "Calling All Destroyers" suggests The Stooges vamping up the theme to "Hawaii Five-O" with twin boosters of soul and psych rock.

Inevitably, Bolan references himself, too; "New York City" – which features Flo & Eddie on backing vocals – leans on the riff from 1968's "One Inch Rock". "That was my comeback record and it

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Bolan's strength has always lain in his ability to produce distinctive, snappy pop tunes, and his weakness is undoubtedly the failure to translate this singles-orientated formula into satisfactory albums. On *Futuristic Dragon* he excels himself on the former and merely restates that there is little he can do about the latter."

HARRY DOHERTY, MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 27, 1973

FUTURISTIC DRAGON

TRACKMARKS

1. Futuristic Dragon (Introduction) ★★★
2. Jupiter Liar ★★★
3. Chrome Sitar ★★★
4. All Alone ★★★
5. New York City ★★★★★
6. My Little Baby ★★★★
7. Calling All Destroyers ★★★★
8. Theme For A Dragon ★★★
9. Sensation Boulevard ★★★
10. Ride My Wheels ★★★★★
11. Dreamy Lady ★★★
12. Dawn Storm ★★★★★
13. Casual Agent ★★★

Label: EMI
Produced by: Marc Bolan
Recorded at: MRI studios, LA; Paragon Studios, Chicago; Scorpio Sound, London
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar, Moog), Steve Currie (bass), Dino Dines (keyboards, organ), Davy Lutton (drums), Gloria Jones (clavinet, backing vocals), Mark Volman, (backing vocals), Howard Kaylan (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 50; US –

was huge," Bolan told Thames Valley Radio in March of 1976, "so it proved that the fans didn't forget me."

"CASUAL AGENT" HAS A QUASI-LATIN FLAVOUR; "DAWN STORM" IS DECKED OUT WITH CHRISTMAS BELLS

HUGE, as ever, was something of an overstatement (it peaked at No 15) but more importantly, it sounded (almost) like the Bolan of old, with its characteristic louche swagger and a shot of the lyrically surreal. "*Did you ever see a woman coming out of New York City with a frog in her hand*", wonders Bolan, repeatedly. He later explained: "I was walking with David Bowie in New York City and we saw this 90-year-old lady who is part of Andy Warhol's Factory and who claims to be a witch. She was walking down Park Avenue with this enormous toad in her hand. It was like something from *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*. The lyric came to me straight away and I used a melody that I'd written for something else. I'm just a journalist for that song."

Gloria Jones's version of the story was rather more mundane – and believable: what Bolan saw was her exiting a limo, holding a Kermit The Frog toy a fan had given him.

The lineup for the *Futuristic Dragon* tour of the UK in 1976 didn't feature Flo & Eddie but it did add American Tyrone Scott, on keyboards and backup vocals, to the Currie/Dines/Jones/Lutton core. Face makeup didn't figure, but a model sci-fantasy dragon, breathing flames, did. It wasn't exactly a triumphant live return: venue sizes were modest and Bolan's scrap with a Bowie fan outside Manchester's Free Trade Hall left him with a black eye. His drinking became an issue, as did his nasty tongue.

Some dates were cancelled. That Bolan chose to stack the set with hits and include just two songs from the new album signalled an acceptance that there was no escaping his glam-boogie identity, despite a pre-tour declaration of his intention "to do a whole new act. I want to do about eight new songs and stay on for about two-and-a-half hours and not do the hits," he said. "I want to open a whole new dimension to me and revert back to Marc Bolan 1969 and move into where my head's at now." A confused message, given that punk was blazing away on the near horizon and set to be Bolan's new enthusiasm.

"WE'RE ALL HAVING GREAT FUN"

No longer acting the star, in 1977 **MARC BOLAN** embraces the grassroots uprising of rock'n'roll with a hot new band, and a tour with The Damned. **PAUL MORLEY** takes a trip down memory lane all the way to his glam rock adolescence, to recall the highs, the lows and to admire Bolan's conviction. "We're all having great fun and wanna play together as long as possible…"

BILL ORCHARD/SHUTTERSTOCK

"All my old enthusiasm's back": Marc in Earls Court, London 1977

NME | MARCH 19, 1977

THE SCENE: Offices somewhere in London... Marc Bolan, just returned from some tryout dates in France, professes to having a tummy bug – but in neat soft green suit he looks healthy enough... His right leg kicks out a lot, he seems more nervous than I am.

ONE OF precious few genuine early-'70s rock'n'roll stars (I can think of two others – one now a graciously indulgent semi-recluse, shades, corkscrew hair, rasp-twist; the other well into hurt-confuse manipulation). The one I mean is Bolan. If you don't think so then you're being as bigoted as you probably think Bolan is. Ya-boo sucks to you if you agedly assumed that he was always earnestly serious.

He was a sculpted, not line-drawn, animated rock star; fluffy cloud pretty, groovy-fun-cosmic, indulgent, arrogant, stylish, the ultimate poser, boaster, leader-onner, leader.

Almost single-handedly he filled a fairly huge gap in the blank redundant early '70s; he had assault, impact, appeal – how could anyone resist him? Maybe my own continual, perhaps dramatically indiscriminate attraction has a lot to do with psychologically meaningful-mid-sex-romance-happenings. (The first rock'n'roll record I ever bought was "Ride A White Swan". I tripped along to see him (H-32, just 6op!) and with magical pouting punkoid panache, no doubt inherited from Bolan, picked up my first-ever girl. The first time I ever got laid was after a Bolan gig – she had corkscrew hair, glitter under her eyes, stars on her cheeks, satin jeans. Phewee! That was a period!)

Yeah, but there was more; his records were up-thrilling. The best derivative, unambitious, flavour-holding bubblegum rock'n'roll of all time. Plenty of fun, lotsa energy, short and sweet, crass, screaming, funny; vum, vum, vum – one after the other.

Bolan's blunt irreverence, his apparent rigid dogmaticism and occasional (people told me) paranoia didn't endear him to many. A lot were quietly, and not so quietly, glad when 'circumstances' led to a fall from grace. But even when things were really down, Bolan was bubbling around, never totally out.

Right now he's crisper, cleaner, more enthusiastic than he's been for a long time. He's bagged a cracking new band, he ain't drinking, he ain't drugging, he's heavily into the beaver year lark. Plus he's as upfront as ever, with better reason than in the last three or four years when things, he admits, were rough.

His heart is light, his grin permanent, and he's not even scared about putting stun-rock experts The Damned as support on his new tour. "The Damned I like a lot. I was introduced to them as one of them had the good taste to wear a Marc Bolan T-shirt. Of those new bands who don't seem to be breaking out of their environment, I thought it'd be nice to have them on tour."

He's not scared they're gonna blast him off stage? "Naah! Not with this band."

"This Band" is the new T.Rex, consisting of Tony Newman, Herbie Flowers, (the infamous) Miller Anderson and Dino Dines. It's the only T.Rex Bolan's been so obviously satisfied with since the basic Finn-Curry-Legend lineup.

"What happened was, I'd broken up the old band" (a ragged Cuny-Dines-Lutton-Anderson lineup that never really came together) "and I had to do a *Supersonic* [*TV pop show*] for 'Laser Love' and there was no group.

"So I said to Herbie and friends, 'Come along.' It was nine o'clock in the morning and we just did it, straight off, five minutes. To make the record with the old band it took a day, and though it was a great song it was a bad record. With this new lot it all went Crack! And I realised that I could record and be excited about it again. So I booked Air Studios that day and we cut four tracks. The new band is everything I've ever wanted.

"John's Children could have been a great group except for inexperience, and the '73 T.Rex was great on record but messy live, although it was what people wanted, what I wanted to do at the time – it was enough just to be out there... I couldn't believe it all.

"But now it's very important to get everything right. There's been a lot of preparation. I've even rehearsed this band, which I've never done before. I just played from record to record. So this new band is very solid. Everybody is proud to be in it. It's what should really have happened at the beginning...

"If I couldn't go on the road with these musicians I'd probably give up music. With this group I'd play with anyone... Stones, The Who, The Rubettes... maybe not Bruce Springsteen – I hear he's got a pretty shit-hot band. Apart from him, anyone."

Backstage at the Rainbow Theatre, London, March 18, 1977: (l-r) Billy idol, Marc Bolan, Brian James and Paul Morley

"THE DAMNED I LIKE A LOT... ONE OF THEM HAD THE GOOD TASTE TO WEAR A MARC BOLAN T-SHIRT"
MARC BOLAN

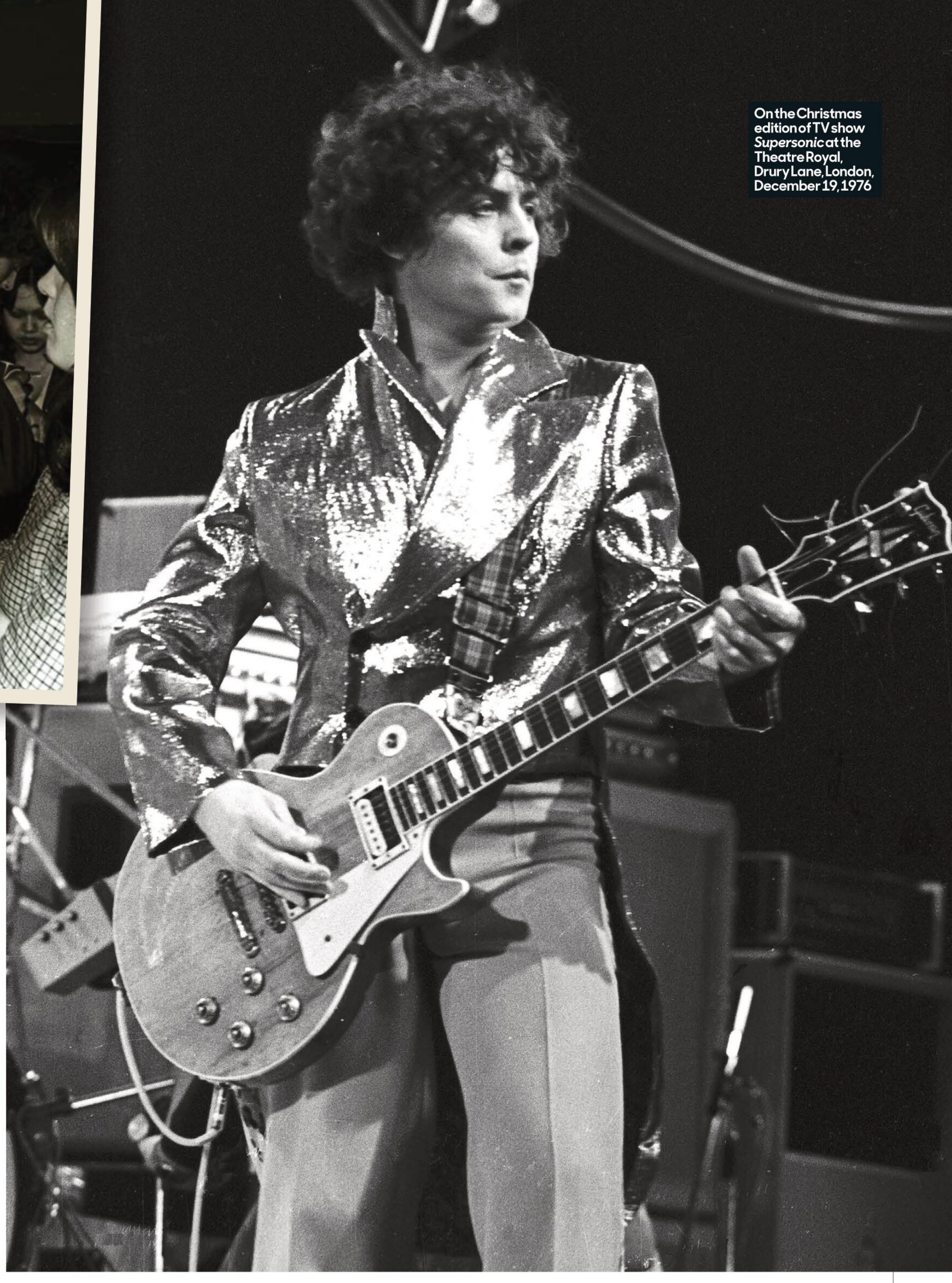
Vamping it with The Damned's Dave Vanian, March 1977

THE making of the new album was fired wholly by the super-duper musicians who jumped to his call – he was reluctant to cut an album with the old band. It was recorded purposefully as an album, not a load of half-forgotten tracks selected from loads previously laid down and thrown together with little thought as the last few have seemed to be.

"The last two were, yeah, but there were reasons for that. American deals, things that had been left over. The last album was purely a contractual thing, plus I wasn't happy with the band.

"But the new album was cut

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGE, ANDRE CSILLAG/SHUTTERSTOCK



On the Christmas edition of TV show *Supersonic* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London, December 19, 1976

very quickly with the new band – I wrote six tracks in the studio, and the rest had been around some time. It's a kind of cross between images and hard rock in a way that I've always wanted. It's got this amazing, very unique, odd sound. Like *Electric Warrior*, it sounds like a period."

Very indefinable.

"Right, the new one's like that. There's a little magic. Something was happening when we made it."

No album since *The Slider* (that and ...*Warrior*, two classics ignored with contemptuous snort as rock-pop-dance-fantasy albums) has been better than good. All have been patchy, with high spots sure, but some ghastly low spots.

"I just really didn't know where I wanted to go. It happens. I started out with such a definite idea of where I wanted to go; going from acoustic to electric. And then I'd done that by '73. After that I was going in certain directions but not all the way. I'd get into things that weren't particularly good for me to get into. Like Japanese Koto music – I'd hear that and want to play Japanese Koto music. I had to organise my head so that I didn't wander off, and it wasn't easy. I consider the new album the first since *The Slider* that I'm 100 per cent satisfied with."

The Slider was a warm, affectionate almost self-mocking album – the perfect follow-up to the crisp, precise and carefully crafted *Electric Warrior*. The latter was the full, urgent fruition of a gradual integration of the basic rock'n'roll sound into Bolan's work that had been gradually evolving since the coy, gloriously smothered, Spectorised *Unicorn* giggle, with the words as gratuitously weird and soundworthy as anything before or since.

Years of confining his instinctive nature to make rock'n'roll exploded in the making of that one album – similar to the Patti Smith years that went into the making of *Horses*.

...*Warrior* was hard to follow up – like *Horses* for Patti – but Bolan's compromise was warmth and mock and involvement, cutting continuity but not making any fresh stand. No claims to complexity, no claims to authenticity, almost a kind of conscious self-pollution that later dramatically degenerated into damagingly unconscious self-pollution.

The Slider was an understatement, a limited cultural scan but still a marvellous mix'n'match bubble rock album – like its predecessor, a masterpiece of inclusion/exclusion.

After *The Slider* things got slightly eccentric. The shoddy throw-together artwork of the *Tanx* album matched the lackadaisical low-key performance. It was just product.

"Mmm, I think it was a mistake to do it in France. Very slick and tight but it lost something. Recording is what you put into it."

And not much was put into it. *Tanx* was the start of a decline both artistically and commercially. Bolan lost control. The next album – *Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow* (or 'A Cream Cage In August') in fact started off heavily wow-don't-fret-it's-all-right, with a wrenched mover,

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS

T.Rex, circa '77: (l–r) Herbie Flowers, Miller Anderson, Marc Bolan, Dino Dines and Tony Newman

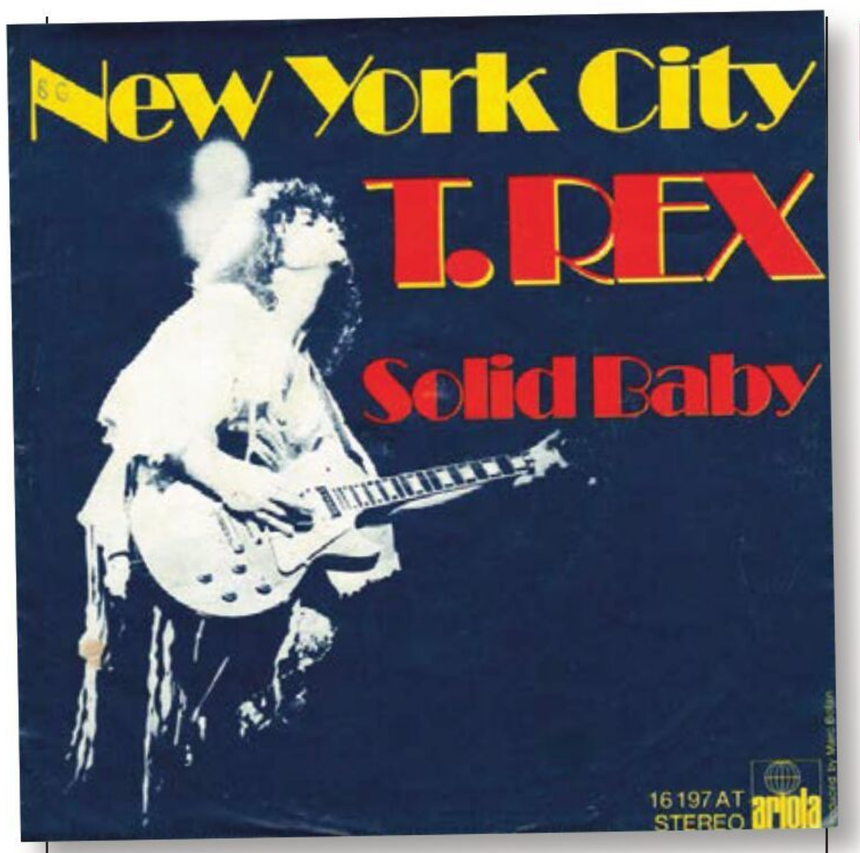
"Venus Loon", that should have been a single. But after that outburst there's little heart, and the one or two really excellent songs ("Loon", "Interstellar Soul") get overwhelmed.

And while single-wise things were unflaggingly entertaining – with great send-up pulp-rock singles like "The Groover", "20th Century Boy", "Solid Gold Easy Action" – each one sold less than the last.

This was not important in effect, because Bolan had had his fun as superstar, but as his audience dropped away he got more and more messy head-wise.

The next album, ...*Zip Gun*, boasted some fine songs, but poor performance and bad finish. Bolan claims the split with Tony Visconti had nothing to do with its imposing claustrophobic production – "Tony hadn't worked heavily for quite a while before ...*Zip Gun*, I just really didn't know where I wanted to go" – but perhaps Bolan was relying too much on his own head when he was already a little unsure of himself, stepping even further out onto the tightrope, and it shows.

"Musically that *Zinc Alloy/Zip Gun* period was really bad. I was getting really split up and things; looking back I was way off beam. I should've just retired for a couple of years.I didn't want to play. In my head I was very upset. I'd get into the studio with all the songs and I didn't want to play them. It was very strange. People had to put up with a lot of shit. I just didn't want to play.I would book the studios and then just sit around."



BOLAN'S crack at America coincided with this dark period. "Over here things were very organised. But in the States I didn't really play when I should have done. *Electric Warrior* and "Get It On" were very big, but I waited two years. When we did play we did very well, but it was all sort of two years too late.

"I guarantee..." (*tarumtarumtarum*) "...that we'll be very big this year. We got a new band, and two or three labels are interested in signing us. We're just gonna go out there like no-one ever heard of me – we've had no product there for three years. We've still got a lot of cool over there, though. Very FM orientated. I never really wanted a string of American hits as I was, quite honestly, I was all booked up to be the BC Roller type things, and in all fairness I'd been through all that over here, enjoyed it, it'd been a groove.

But I had no intention of going through it all again. Now I'm ready to go there, and do it like I always wanted to – it'll be hard, but we'll do it. We got a good sort of hardcore public over there."

Bolan's decision to release one of the all-time bad rock singles, "Zip Gun Boogie", he regards as a calculated artistic cut-out – to end a bad patch both artistically and saleswise with a horrendous single. Slam! Start again.

GEMS/REDFERNS

"New York City" was the comeback – a glorious single, one of my favourites of last year, a calm minimalism with cocky surety.

"Everybody said that after 'Zip Gun Boogie' it'd be hard for me to get a hit single, but I proved them wrong. 'New York City' was a hit single."

Sadly, last year's album, *Futuristic Dragon*, was very limp. Bitty, uninspired, but like those other albums since *The Slider*, so promising, just needing some care. "Yeah, that was bad. Bits of American and English tapes, I haven't played that for a long time."

Neither have I.

"I think from now on I'm not going to record for six months at a time. There's no point in going in the studios all the time. I've changed my whole approach... I'm gonna make sure I know exactly where I am."

He seems well in control again. The new band helped?

"Yeah."

It's been a good thing for you?

"Oh, amazing. All my old enthusiasm's back."

Perhaps for the first time in Bolan's stage career, there's some discipline. The '72–'73 T.Rex had no fixed standards laid down; it was enough that he just walked out and did some songs (pure excitement). Later, drugs and drink interfered. Wishy-washy bands and untogether repertoires spoilt the gigs – despite even the worst having that... something.

Right now he's really enjoying himself.

"We're all having great fun and wanna play together as long as possible. No Gloria; all men. New material, very little golden-oldie stuff, and those done tight, not sprawled. In fact I'm doing an electric 'Debora', a punk 'Debora'. It sounds like shooting a shark gun. I dunno why... sorta, 'Purk' – Miller and I are doing a very precise guitar sound."

"I DON'T DRINK, I DON'T SMOKE, I DON'T TAKE DRUGS. I SCREW A LOT"
MARC BOLAN

Your're going on stage sober?

"I don't drink at all now. Not for two months. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't take drugs. I screw a lot."

The '72 spirit seems well returned, mixed with a studied maturity. Which has got to be a hellishly good thing. The tour with The Damned – 'Two and a half hours of Punk Funk' – has to be the tour of the year.

And he's still using the T.Rex name...

"Right, it's because I want to do a Marc Bolan album, but I don't know what it is yet. It's gonna be like nothing I've ever done before. Might be a spoken word album, it might just be me cracking eggs with loads of echo..."

LIVE!

NME | MARCH 19, 1977

T.REX/THE DAMNED

NEWCASTLE CITY HALL, MARCH 10, 1977

AS THESE performances by Marc Bolan and The Damned at Newcastle City Hall last Thursday proved, it's all – to wheel out that old cliché – a matter of mind and not age whether you can rock'n'roll or not.

Granted you have to be this side of middle age to rock with conviction, but Bolan, a product of the late-'60s rock revolution, is no spring chicken any more. Moreover, he's received a unanimous critical thumbs down (*not quite unanimous! – Bolan Head Ed*) for so long now, one wondered if it wouldn't be best for all of us if he didn't throw in the towel.

But on Thursday, the opening night of Bolan's first tour in over a year, he was back on form with a clean, well-tailored set of old and new material, looking thinner and fitter than he has for ages, and backed by an excellent band of mature and highly skilled rock musicians.

But first The Damned, who're the first new-wave band to actually get an album out and get themselves on a major tour. No two ways about it, The Damned are a rush. They look great, play well (especially Rat Scabies, who looks all set to join the ranks of the truly great British rock drummers with his brilliantly crazed playing, which reeks of panache) and can actually write good rock'n'roll songs.

The Damned also possess character, and one which, with Scabies' madcap rake personality and singer Dave Vanian's bizarre, though not threatening Hammer horror-fetish (rather eccentric), is overtly British. The music they play might well be derived from Detroit and New York bands, but the slant they give it is distinctly east of the Atlantic.

Apart from Vanian, whose vocals don't match up to his persona, The Damned come across better on stage than on record, where their exhilarating energy isn't so potent.

Marc, cute in his, canary yellow bum freezer and purple drainies, unlike The Damned, doesn't give it to the audience all on a plate right from the start, but gradually builds his set so that by the closing lengthy "Get It On" the audience is totally infected.

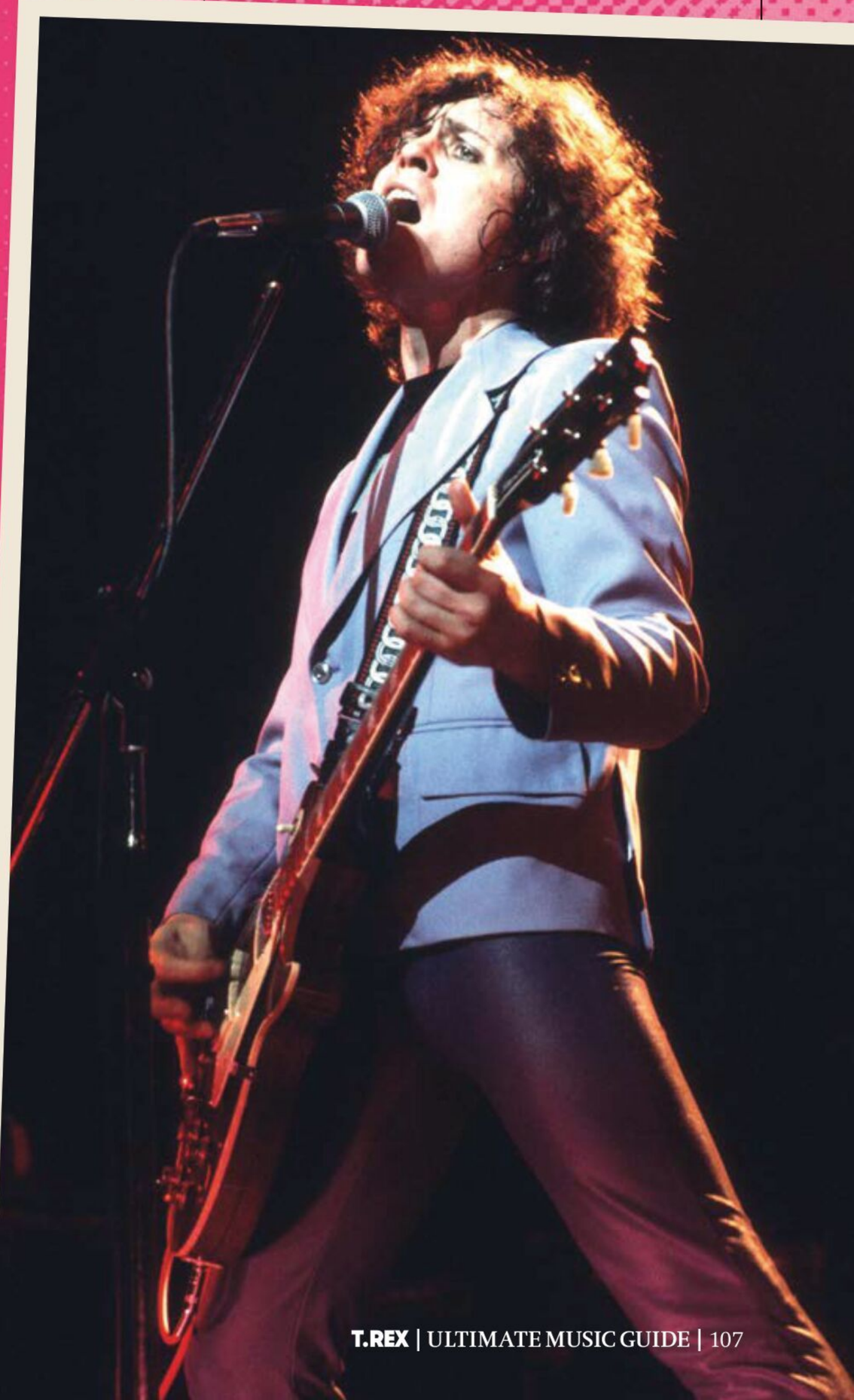
The place isn't quite full, and the front of the hall is taken up with Marc's committed fans, banners and all. Bolan treats his audience with affection, sings well and plays fine guitar. His solos are well constructed and relatively cliché free.

Behind him Miller Anderson duplicates the chord parts to Bolan's songs, Tony Newman plays exemplary muscular drums, Herbie Flowers is as highly dexterous as ever on bass, and Dino Dines is tasteful on keyboards.

Bolan plays a lot of material from his new album, *Dandy In The Underworld*, and given its limitations it sounds like the best stuff he's come up with in a long time. And the band always play well, so that even the lame "I Love To Boogie" sounds good because of their performance.

A thoroughly enjoyable evening, and one which juxtaposed two distinct forms of '70s rock'n'roll.

STEVE CLARKE



IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

T. REX

DANDY IN THE UNDERWORLD

RELEASED | MARCH 11, 1977

Clean, confident (and jogging at the petrol station), a freshly dandified punk mentor embraces modern pop angles on his final album. BY NICK HASTED

MARC BOLAN'S black leather handbag fell into a journalist's hands in 1977, after he'd fallen out of their shared limo into the night. Nosing inside, the reporter found the items Bolan deemed essential in the first month of his final year: his Ivor Novello award for "Hot Love", a safety pin (for punk camouflage?), toy catalogue, Max Factor Blushing Amber makeup, Wild Musk spray, pink hairbrush, "I Love To Boogie" badge, champagne cork, and hand-written lyrics to his latest minor hit, "Laser Love". The journalist's point was that Bolan wasn't carrying drugs. He was clean and looked it, rejuvenated from his Fat Elvis phase back to his elfin bopping weight, and set on career resurrection.

"I feel quite healthy at the moment," Bolan confirmed, "and I want to be able to cope with at least seven months' hard work without artificial stimulus." His confidence was buoyed by *Dandy In The Underworld*, his most cohesive and professional album since Visconti quit, played by T.Rex's slickest iteration, now including old session pros like bassist Herbie Flowers.

Two fresh moves bracketed its release. First, the March 1977 tour promoting it booked The Damned as support. Bolan had plugged punk acts in his *Record Mirror* column and, already half a has-been, now reinvented himself as the movement's supportive godfather. The tour began at Newcastle City Hall, a week after Bowie played keyboards on Iggy Pop's Idiot tour there, in a more austere claim to punk kudos. "He was amazingly amenable," The Damned's Brian James once told me. "Marc used to wear a little green tracksuit, and when we'd stop at services he'd be jogging around the petrol pumps, really healthy. Nine out of ten were there to see Marc. And at the last show [*at Locarno Portsmouth*], everyone played 'Get It On' together."

Dandy In The Underworld was further promoted by that summer's *Marc* TV show. One of a sequence of cheaply made, Muriel Young-produced Granada series exploiting pop fads (the Bay City Rollers and the Arrows got shows too), Bolan lip-synced new and classic T.Rex tunes even as he slipped old muckers and punk protégés onto the bill (The Jam and Showaddywaddy, Generation X and "Robin Askwith, the movie star"). Leaping breathlessly between sets, and bizarrely cheered only by a cartoon audience, he took this new showbiz turn in his stride.

T.Rex looked almost ridiculous by this point in the summer of punk, and yet Marc never lost his cool. Whether gratuitously topless or with a ripped punk shirt beneath his corkscrew hair, he was charming and knowing throughout, impossible to deny when asking: "Keep a little Marc in your heart."

So public affection was T.Rex's again. The problem of their musical longevity, of whether Bolan could meet his own early estimation (saying on hearing Dylan and The Beatles that "I was on that sort of level of being an artist"), wasn't, however, answered by *Dandy In The Underworld*. Bolan the stubbornly limited guitarist maintained his usual boogie rhythm, on tracks now semi-modernised with gleaming synths. "I Love To Boogie", which had surprisingly threatened the Top 10 the previous summer, by contrast relied on Bontempi-style keyboard bounce, retooling Chuck Berry yet again and, like him, refusing to lyrically graduate from "*high school boogie*".

Dandy In The Underworld was lifted thematically by its title track. *"Distraction he wanted, to destruction he fell"*, Bolan sang of a protagonist much like himself in his coked-up nadir, dressed for stardom but sinking fast. *"But change is a monster and change it is hard"*, he continued, as if addressing his recent creative stasis. *"When will he come up for air/Oh! Will anybody ever care?"* As the *Marc* show confirmed, Bolan's good humour had certainly made a comeback in 1977, and there's no self-pity in this cautionary tale.

"Crimson Moon" continued the

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"It's a consistent album, very listenable, well arranged, immaculately played, but it lacks the weirdness and inspiration of *The Slider*, of which it sometimes sounds like a more sensible, copy... As usual there's the odd Bolan mixture of obscurantist philosophising and onomato-poetic gobble-degook offset by those melodic choruses..."
PHIL McNEILL, NME, APRIL 2, 1977

DANDY IN THE UNDERWORLD

TRACKMARKS

1. Dandy In The Underworld ★★★★
2. Crimson Moon ★★★
3. Universe ★★★★
4. I'm a Fool For You Girl ★★
5. I Love To Boogie ★★
6. Visions Of Domino ★★★
7. Jason B Sad ★★★★
8. Groove A Little ★★★
9. Hang-ups ★★★★
10. Soul Of My Suit ★★★
11. Pain And Love ★★★
12. Teen Riot Structure ★★★

Label: EMI
Produced by: Marc Bolan
Recorded at: Decibel Studios, AIR Studios and Trident Studios, London and MRI Studios, LA
Personnel: Marc Bolan (vocals, guitar, maracas, tambourine, bass, percussion), Herbie Flowers (bass), Steve Currie (bass), Scott Edwards (bass), Davy Lutton (drums), Tony Newman (drums), Paul Fenton (drums), Dino Dines (keyboards, synthesiser), Bob Weir (guitar, vocals) Chris Mercer (tenor saxophone), Bud Beadle (baritone saxophone, flute), Steve Gregory (flute), J Long (flute), Miller Anderson (guitar), Alfalpha (backing vocals), Gloria Jones (backing vocals), Steve Harley (backing vocals), Colin Jacas (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 26; US –

album's early vigour, lyrically splicing phrases of pulp sci-fi and glamour with practised skill, as Bolan advised a lover: *"You can mix your martinis from the blood of the sun"*. The strings on "Visions Of Domino", sleekly slicing upward, were Philly glam disco. "Hang-ups" suggested Bolan had heard Kraftwerk – or at least *Low* – as synths glided and he crudely repeated the past: *"Aah, shit, let's get it on"*. "Pain And Love" posited a gothically gloomy T.Rex fronted by Scott Walker. But rather than true depression, it showed Bolan relishing new angles of pop craft. Such moments lifted the feather-light thinness of his production and musical thought.

"PAIN AND LOVE" POSITED A GOTHICALLY GLOOMY T.REX FRONTED BY SCOTT WALKER

THE barrier Bolan couldn't or wouldn't break remained any measures of personal authenticity and revelation. Bolan's poetic pretensions had captivated the audience at Middle Earth with the same alien vibe that Tony Visconti caught on first seeing him; a mesmeric otherness Bowie went on to internalise instead. But this had all gone by 1977. Bolan remained unknowable, but in the superficial showbiz way of, say, TV's art teacher Tony Hart. Despite doing a Tony Hancock and dumping all his crucial collaborators, from Steve Peregrin Took to Visconti, he'd managed to arrest a similarly messy decline. Yet at 29, he didn't know how to make his teen idol creation grow up, instead seeking to retain his youthful looks and profitably continue what journalist Jonh Ingham felt were "debauched... Dorian Gray... fantasies".

As for hitching a ride on punk, the last single released in his lifetime, "Celebrate Summer" (*"Hey little punk/Summer's not a bummer, it's a stunner"*) wasn't quite as convincing as a B-side he had recorded with Gloria Jones that January. "City Port" has a leering noir loucheness, and winking future vision: *"I had the 1980s scare/No hair/That's right..."*

Marc Bolan kept his hair, his pop wits, and his showbiz poise. *Dandy In The Underworld* marked a minor commercial resurgence. And when Bowie closed what became *Marc*'s final episode, singing "Heroes" and then chortling when Bolan stumbled out of sight as the credits rolled, there was no tragic portent, just two friends laughing at daftness. Bolan was robbed by a random tragedy from any fuller, richer comeback, but was granted instead a unique narrative. Having made it through the Underworld, he remained, for posterity, a dandy ever young, preserved in amber. ✪

"IT WASN'T FINISHED"

On the set of his TV show, a last chance to watch **MARC BOLAN** in his element. Reconciled with **DAVID BOWIE**, the pair jam and duet successfully on a show due to be broadcast on September 28.1977. As **NME** reports, on September 16, Bolan – on the brink of a comeback – dies in a car accident in south-west London

The king of the mountain departeth: Marc Bolan, Sept 30, 1947 – Sept 16, 1977

MELODY MAKER | SEPTEMBER 17, 1977

"OH, THAT'S REALLY Polaroid! You've gotta keep the ending!"

David Bowie rocked with laughter and Marc Bolan wiped away the tears that had threatened to turn his finest hour into a nightmare. The great day when David and Marc were reunited for a TV show will pass into the history books as one of the funniest episodes never filmed.

Perhaps one should say never video-taped, for the last show in the series *Marc* put together by Granada TV turned out to be a drama of such pathos and uproar that it made *Coronation Street* seem dull, if that's at all possible.

There were tears, outbursts of swearing, bitter rows and the breaking of light bulbs – everything seemed to go wrong when David joined his old chum for rehearsals and recording at Granada's Manchester studios last Wednesday.

The clash between old wave and new wave was further heightened by the power of trade unions and the congenital inability of rock people to get it together in anything like a normal, orderly fashion. It was 10 breaks and split-second timing versus artistic temperament and inexperience.

I thought it funny but I'm sure producer Muriel Young didn't, nor did the manager of Generation X, who turned up three hours late without any equipment, nor Barrie Masters and his famous Rods, who never got to appear on the show after waiting around for two days.

In the event, by the miracle of editing and technical wizardry, the show will go out complete with the Rods, and David making a rare British television appearance, on all ITV regions on Wednesday, September 28 at 4.20pm. But it would have been more exciting if they had videoed the dramas taking place in and around the studio.

Marc was in his element as a television star and part-time artistic director. As one studio boss was forced to ejaculate when Marc was bellowing instructions: "I don't know why I'm the floor manager!" Said Marc, "When you've got your name up in lights, you've gotta take responsibilities."

The show was born out of Marc's dream to be a media man, dating back to when he once did some interviews for London Television. Here he could invite his favourite guest artists, do a bit of chat and generally camp it up in time-honoured Bolan fashion.

As a cross between Judy Garland and Louis B Mayer he was brilliant. But one of the lads in the heavy rock combos booked for the show stopped me dead in the gents by demanding: "Is he queer?" "Nah, course not. Straight as a die, our old Marc," I protested.

A few minutes later Marc sailed past us in the corridor calling out coyly: "What shall I wear? I

Bolan and Bowie (briefly) play out the final *Marc* show with a bluesy jam later dubbed "Standing Next To You", Sept 9, 1977

know, the green dress with black suspenders." In fact he turned up wearing a leopard-skin creation that even a leopard might have baulked at.

The whole day was worthy of being turned into one of those probing documentaries where people bare their souls and the holes in their socks before cameras so discreet that nobody seems aware of their presence.

It was just like *The World About Us*. The cast of characters included Marc's PR Keith Altham, recently recovered from a nervous collapse that he threatened would be brought on again if Barbara De Witt said another word; Barbara De Witt, David's American PR lady who wanted to know what Keith Altham was doing bringing so many press in her artist's wake; Bob Hart of *The Sun*, anxious to see Keith Altham, buying him a drink ("You're the only publicist I can't afford to have lunch with"); Jeff Dexter, '60s hippie deejay, and now partner with Tony Gourvish in Marc's management; the said Mr Gourvish resplendent in genuine 1968 Teddy boy jacket; and Eric Hall the man from EMI.

The whole party descended by train upon Manchester and spent the day being hustled out of the studio by David's bodyguard, a charmingly polite gentleman who kept appearing in front of us saying, "You'll have to leave – now." I half-expected to meet him at the front gate when I got home that night, holding up both hands to bar any further progress.

The main targets of his life's work (sending people in the opposite direction from whence they came) were Marc Bolan's manager, his press officer, and various friends hoping to see David after his absence from the scene for many years.

"Ain't it strange what some people will do" was the rather apt song being danced to by Heart Throb, the show's troupe of girl dancers who had chosen to wear plastic see-through bowler-hats for their routine.

On came the Rods – Barrie Masters in jeans and shirt – miming to their backing track on "Do Anything You Wanna Do". "It's a bit Mick Mouse, this show," he said as he came off the rostrum, indicating that he and the boys had been hanging around in the studio all day waiting to do their bit.

Generation X arrived red of hair and pink of cheeks, somewhat breathless from a disastrous day spent on the M1. A broken-down van, no equipment available – the bad news experienced by many a group.

But it didn't stop them adopting the aggressive attitude expected of a new wave combo. As offers were being made to lend them equipment they discussed, jokingly, whether or not to smash up Marc's guitar. "What will it cost us – 400 quid?"

Eventually guitars were lent, including Rod Paul Gray's bass (he told me that if the X-men smashed up his bass guitar, he would smash them up).

Miraculously, amplifiers and instruments were procured and Generation X stormed into their big number "Your Generation" and Billy Idol their pretty lead singer looking aggressively angelic. In fact they played so well I found myself clapping their performance, lone applause that must have sounded almost insulting in the silence of the studio as the echoes died rapidly away.

WHILE DAVID HAD HIS FACE MADE UP, MARC CALLED TO THE FLOOR MANAGER, "DO YOU WANT ME FRONT OR BACK?"

But Generation X's discomfort was not over. They had to play a number at least five more times, constantly being stopped by the technicians, something all musicians detest.

Marc had to keep repeating the same introduction: "This is Generation X. They have a new singer, Billy Idol, who is supposed to be as pretty as me. I ain't so sure. Check it out." Eventually he stumbled over the words by the sixth attempt. "Me brain weren't connected to me leg," he explained with a grin.

Meanwhile more rows were breaking out between Generation X's manager and producer Muriel. As Stewart bellowed abuse across the studio floor, Muriel, a very ladylike professional, simply walked away.

"It's appalling," said Stewart [*Joseph*]. "Now they are only going to show half the song or pull it out. We'll do *Top of The Pops* instead. Let's go!" He made a move for the exits, but the band stayed on and later Granada confirmed that X would be in the show.

WHILE the September 28 show was still being recorded the day's edition was going out, featuring Marc singing "Let's Dance", the old Chris Montez hit which sounded pretty good given the Bolan treatment, as well as his new single "Celebrate Summer".

Now it was time for the studio to be cleared while Marc and David rehearsed their big number. Momentarily eluding the bodyguard, I managed to hide behind a piece of scenery as Bolan and Bowie joined forces with Herbie Flowers, Dino Dines and Tony Newman. It sounded like a bit of a shambles to the uninitiated.

In fact the song was only just put together in time and remained untitled, a bit of casual rock jamming. But it was fun to see them together and they sounded pretty funky with Marc blazing enthusiastically on lead guitar.

And to complete the atmosphere of revivalism, Marc launched himself into "Debora", a new version, which had to be cut when the backing track seemed to go out of sequence. "I don't mind lip-synching but when it's the WRONG verse..." complained Marc tartly. Suddenly there came a bellowed announcement: "Will anybody not on the show please leave the studio!" Once more we were herded outside. "Oh, why did we come?" said the Rods, also hustled away.

But a kindly floor manager, keeping remarkably cool, swiftly let the entourage back in again to witness the final historic chapter. David readied himself for his solo number, "Heroes" from the album. With his jeans carefully rolled up to reveal lace-up boots, he stood coolly before the microphone, careless of the chatter of the studio.

Ignoring some impudent feedback, he began singing, slowly and lowly at first with a deep voice that always comes as a surprise from one of such slim build. There were pregnant pauses between bars and then suddenly he bellowed forth, *"I will be king and you will be queen.../We can be heroes, just for one day/We can be heroes!"* it was a remarkable performance even in a cold TV studio.

Now it was Marc's big moment when he was to join David for the taping of their hastily sketched-out number. While David had his face made up, Marc called anxiously to the floor manager: "Do you want me front or back?" "Just touch your toes, Marc," called out one of the Rods waiting to do their number on the opposite rostrum.

The mighty duo began their number and, said Billy Idol approvingly from the sidelines, "It's got that disco beat all right." "What an old pooftah" grumbled a roadie uncharitably.

Suddenly there was competition on stage as

Back in the swing: performing "Crimson Moon" on *Supersonic*, February 1977

the number ground to a halt. "We're getting electric shocks up here," shrieked Marc pointing towards the microphones. Nobody moved. Time was ticking dangerously away. At 7pm the union would pull the plugs out and head for home and beauty sleep.

Attempts were being made by the production team to stop the band. "We're rehearsing actually," said Marc, somewhat put out. David stood quietly to one side smiling and unperturbed, but suddenly he frowned. "That wasn't the actual take, was it?" he asked as the truth began to dawn. "What do you mean, not really? Either it was or it wasn't."

"1-2-3-4!" and Tony Newman uncertainly set the drums rolling once more. At this point Marc fell off the stage with excitement. "A wooden box for Marc, please," said David. "Look, we've got to do that again, it wasn't finished." But the studio man was calling, "Let's have the Rods, please. The Rods obediently scrambled onto their rostrum to start recording and David and Marc instantly started jamming. At 7pm precisely all the lights went out and the technicians disappeared. "You've got a black-out, mate!" called a voice from the floor.

A furious row broke out between the Rods and the producer when it was realised there was no time for the group to do their number. "This is really unfair," said Barrie Masters. "We've been waiting here all day to go on, and we came up from London yesterday to do the show. That's two days wasted." The Rods stormed off to their dressing room, where a certain amount of swearing went on. Bolan was allegedly locked in his dressing room in tears and Bowie languidly viewed the results of the day's work on the video tape machine. All was smiles when it was realised they had something of a classic in the can, even it if was a shambles.

If there was any acrimony it evaporated later. On the train going back to London, David sat next to Barrie and the rest of the Rods shared beer, wine and chicken legs. "I want to do a tour of Britain in the New Year," he said. "Starting in Glasgow and working my way down. I really want to play again. Today was great fun."

David also said that he had recorded a Christmas show with Bing Crosby of all people, and had also been recording album tracks with Marc. But it was good to see him back again, and perhaps next time we see him he'll be hero not just for a day but a whole tour.

CHRIS WELCH

Dreamy lady: Bolan poses with Gloria Jones in London, June 18, 1976

ANWAR HUSSEIN/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES, MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Farewell to a London boy: David Bowie at the funeral of Marc Bolan, Golders Green Crematorium, September 20, 1977

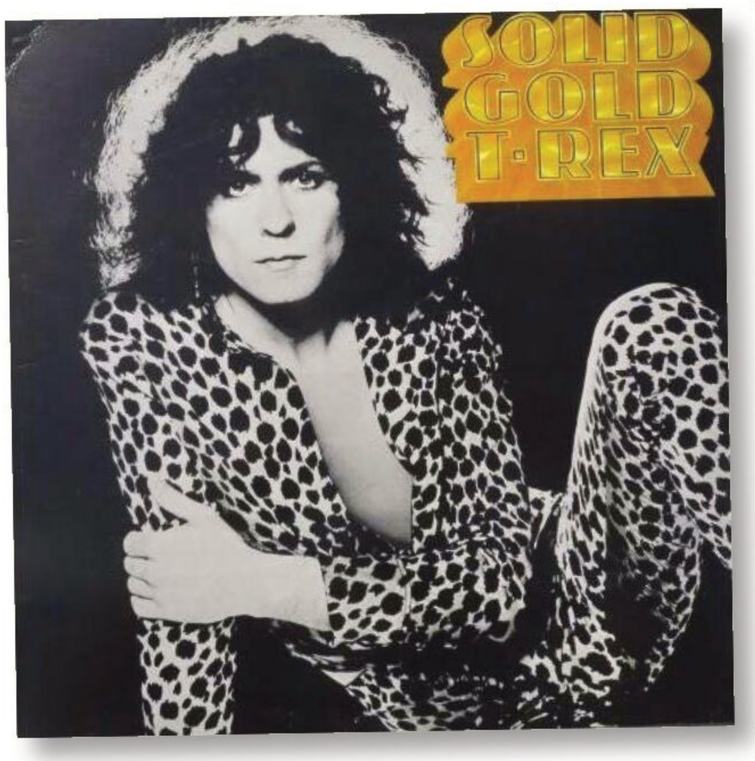
NME | SEPTEMBER 24, 1977

MARC BOLAN'S lady Gloria Jones had still not been told of his death on Tuesday, when his funeral took place at Golders Green. She was still in shock after an operation on her fractured jaw, but was said to be recovering and resting comfortably. The couple's 20-month-old son Rolan was being looked after by Marc's parents.

Bolan died when the Mini in which he was passenger, with Gloria at the wheel, crashed into a tree in Barnes, south-west London, last Friday morning. They were returning home after a late meal at a West End restaurant with Gloria's brother, Richard Jones, who was following behind in his own car. The crash occurred at a notorious accident black-spot, on the far side of a hump-back bridge and on a wet surface.

Bolan himself did not drive and had never held a licence. He had also emerged from a self-confessed period of drug taking and hard drinking, sparked by his decline in popularity and his divorce. He gave up both drugs and drink when Gloria came into his life, and was poised – both mentally and professionally – for a major comeback. The first step in this direction was his own Granada TV series, which he completed filming shortly before his death – screening of the final show, with the full consent of his family, is next Wednesday (28). His TV producer Muriel Young said this week, "He won the admiration of everyone in the studio. He really cared about his show, his colleagues and his music." And plans were already being laid for Marc and T.Rex to headline a major tour at the end of the year.

TV PRODUCER MURIEL YOUNG SAID, "HE REALLY CARED ABOUT HIS SHOW, HIS COLLEAGUES AND HIS MUSIC"



EMI Records were planning to release a compilation album titled *Solid Gold T.Rex* on October 14, consisting of a dozen of his hit singles which he had chosen himself. The LP will still be coming out, but it's possible that the title may now be changed, and that it will become a commemorative set. Bolan's publicist said there is "a fair amount" of new T.Rex material in the can, and available for future release, though there are no immediate plans to issue any singles.

Bolan's peak was in the years 1971–73, when after a relatively fruitless period fronting John's Children, he expanded the Tyrannosaurus Rex duo formation – and T.Rex was born. They had a string of No 1 hits with "Hot Love", "Get It On" "Telegram Sam" and "Metal Guru"; four No 2 successes with "Ride A White Swan", "Jeepster", "Children Of The Revolution" and "Solid Gold Easy Action"; and several other Top 10 entries.

During that period, Bolan was one of the hottest properties on the British scene. But his success took a tumble when he became a tax exile in America, where he was unable to emulate his British achievements. There followed a period in limbo, but as Bolan started his fightback, he once again stood on the threshold of the big time.

He headlined a short tour earlier this year, with The Damned as guest artists, but he was hoping for more substantial developments in the coming months. His greatest ambition was to have another No 1 hit, but tragically it was never to be realised. ✪

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LIVE & COMPILATIONS

RELEASED 1972-2017

Solid gold completist action: choice pickings from the oceans of Rex comps, plus notable live sets. BY PETER WATTS

PICKING your way through the stacks of T.Rex compilations is a daunting task. There are 37 listed in Wikipedia's "selective list", but head to AllMusic and you will find well over 100, while Discogs has more than 200. Most were released posthumously, but even when he was alive Bolan was a big enough star to warrant half-a-dozen compilations of both T.Rex and pre-Rex material.

Where to turn to in this deluge? Well, that is partly a matter of what you are looking for, but there's something for every taste, from those who just want the hits to those after a deep dive into the vaults. **Bolan Boogie** FLY, 1972 ★★★★★ is a decent starting point. This was pushed out on Fly after Bolan left to form his own label and contains a few early T.Rex singles ("Jeepster", "Hot Love", "Get It On", "Ride A White Swan") and B-sides, plus some great Tyrannosaurus Rex tracks. It's a bit shameless, but the cover is good (Bobby Gillespie made it into a T-shirt for an *NME* shoot) and there's a fine track selection. It was released at the height of Bolanmania and went to No 1. Also from the early days, there's **The Beginning Of Doves** TRACK, 1974 ★★★★, which contained Bolan's pre-Rex demos and singles. Many of the songs aren't fully formed, but there are several gems to be found for those who like obscurities and it's a far stronger collection than you usually get with albums of this type (there's another version of this album from 1981 called *You Scare Me To Death* that peps up the acoustic demos with rocking overdubs). If you like your Bolan with bongos and buttercup sandwiches, search out **The Definitive Tyrannosaurus Rex** SEQUEL, 1993 ★★★★★, which has 30-odd tracks from the original duo including all the singles and non-album tracks plus a fine culling of the strongest songs from the first four albums.

Moving into the prime T.Rex years, the deeply desirable **20th Century Boy** EMI AUSTRALIA, 1981 ★★★★★ is worth digging deep for. This Australian triple-vinyl, career-spanning import managed to catalogue the big glam hits, plus solo, John's Children and Tyrannosaurus Rex singles, Dib Cochran and Big Carrot rarities, B-sides and album tracks. **History Of T.Rex – The Singles Collection 1968–1977** MARC ON WAX, 1986 ★★★★ is a slightly more conventional 4LP/3CD collection that has A- and B-sides of every single from "Debora" to "Crimson Moon". It runs out of steam towards the end, but doesn't miss any of the big smashes.

A more manageable collection of hits can be found on the fine **20th Century Boy: The Ultimate Collection** HIP-O RECORDS, 2002 ★★★★★, which offers pretty much all the hot stuff and no filler. Don't be put off by the cheapo cover. Covering similar territory, there's Universal's **The Essential Collection** UNIVERSAL, 1995 ★★★★, which has a sizeable selection of hits and sounds pretty good. If you want deeper cuts, pre-Rex singles, the Took era and more songs – go for the very decent **Greatest Hits** UNIVERSAL, 2007 ★★★★★, which is also one of the few Bolan compilations to have decent artwork. There are dozens more – plus bonus material to accompany the rereleased studio albums – but stick to the ones suggested and you won't be disappointed.

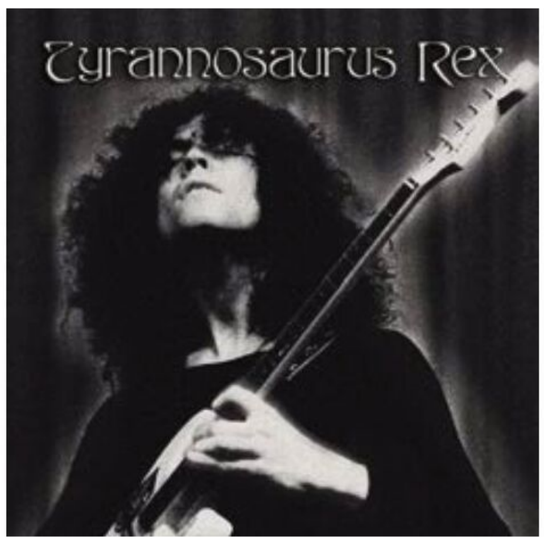
If you like your music to come in a box, look no further than **20th Century Superstar** UNIVERSAL, 2002 ★★★★★, which is the completist's dream: four CDs starting with Bolan's Toby Tyler folk demos and including all the hits and best album tracks plus several unreleased songs, including some demos Tyrannosaurus Rex recorded with Joe Boyd in 1967. They even include Bowie's "The Prettiest Star", on which Bolan guested. It's Bolan's life in a box. Included in the set are some BBC sessions and these can be found in their entirety on the **Bolan At The Beeb** POLYDOR, 2007 ★★★★, collating sessions he recorded between 1967 and 1971, which thanks to Bob Harris and John Peel was plenty. A later **Marc Bolan At The BBC** UNIVERSAL, 2013 ★★★★★ extended this to six CDs, including John's Children and prime T.Rex cuts. It also

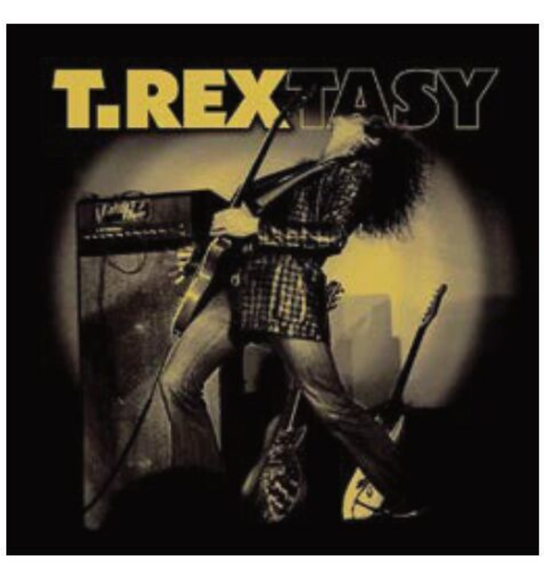
CRITICS' VERDICTS

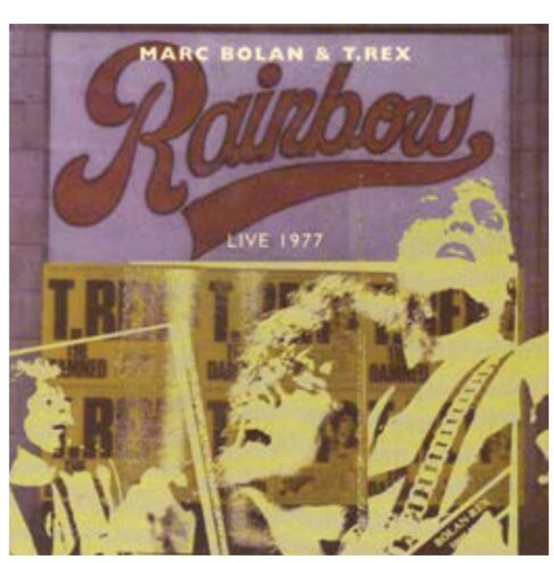
YOU SCARE ME TO DEATH
"The demos don't so much hint at this middle (earth) period as look further ahead... 'You've Got The Power' especially works well as a piece of glitter boogie *avant la lettre*."
PAUL TICKELL, NME, OCT 31, 1981

THE BEGINNING OF DOVES
"A post-John's Children/pre-T.Rex set of acoustic songs, it shows Marc at his most mistrelesque, all wandering soul and jingly-jangly boots (one imagines) and vibrato warble in full effect."
CHRIS ROBERTS, MELODY MAKER, NOV 11, 1991

LIVE & COMPILATIONS



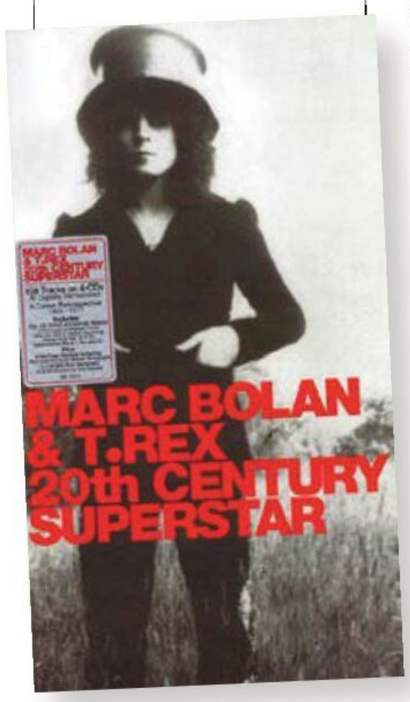




came in a single-disc best-of version.

When it comes to the real rarities, there's a very good Tyrannosaurus Rex boxset – **A Whole Zinc Of Finches** EASY ACTION, 2006 ★★★★ featuring a mix of live recordings, demos and interviews, while the devoted will love **Unchained: Unreleased Recordings 1972–1977** EDSEL, 2015 ★★★, which is the latest (eight-CD) version of Bolan's home demos, alternate versions and unfinished songs. Finally **The Electric Boogie: Nineteen Seventy One** EASY ACTION, 2007 ★★★★ is a very good if unnecessarily thorough exploration of Bolan's pivotal 1971, featuring home demos, live recordings and an alternative version of *Electric Warrior*.

There aren't quite as many T.Rex live albums as there are compilations, but there are still several to pick from. Starting with Tyrannosaurus Rex, there's **Midnight Court At The Lyceum** NMC, 1998 ★★, recorded at a Lyceum all-nighter and featuring tracks from the first three albums. This was previously circulated as a popular bootleg. You can also get Bolan and Finn playing a 30-minute showcase for John Peel, released as **BBC Radio 1 Live** WINDSONG, 1993 ★★★, although these are all surpassed by **A Crown Of Dark Swansdown** EASY ACTION, 2016 ★★★★★, recorded in Germany in 1970 and capturing the band moving inexorably towards glam. Perfectly recorded, it contains a stunning "Pavilions Of Sun" and is worth your attention.



Moving forward, **T.Rextasy** EASY ACTION, 2017 ★★ was recorded in 1971 at the height of T.Rex's popularity and taken from a number of different concerts. Despite that, Bolan still plays some meandering folky stuff, with the hard rockers not quite translating. Better is **Born To Boogie** EDSEL, 2016 ★★★★★, which has both concerts from Wembley in 1972 as recorded for the film of the same name. Great sound, great energy, worth a go. Four excellent and informative American radio sessions from 1971 and 1972 are collected on **Spaceball: The American Radio Sessions** APPLEBUSH, 2010 ★★★★, while the later version of T.Rex is captured on **Live 1977** EDSEL, 1977 ★★★★, featuring highlights of concerts at the Rainbow and Portsmouth Locarno (support act The Damned guest on "Get It On") and accompanied for no discernible reason by five terrific tracks recorded in Cleveland three years previously. ✪

Ride a black Roller: Bolan and fans at a pressing plant, Hayes, Middlesex, June 19, 1972

SOLID GOLD CHART ACTION

The lifetime UK singles discography of Marc Bolan.

BY MARK BEAUMONT

MARC BOLAN
The Wizard DECCA, NOV 19, 1965

Featuring an unknown sessioneer named Jimmy Page, Bolan's debut single was a nifty piece of beat-psych supposedly inspired by his acting flatmate Riggs O'Hara, who must have been playing a fairly straightforward wizard that week.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

MARC BOLAN
The Third Degree

DECCA, JUNE 3, 1966

Fairly by-numbers beat pop, notable only for imaginative lines like *"philosophising mad psychiatrist closing off my mind in darkness"*. Greatness foreshadowed? Listen for Bolan's occasional deployment of the T.Rex vocal trill.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

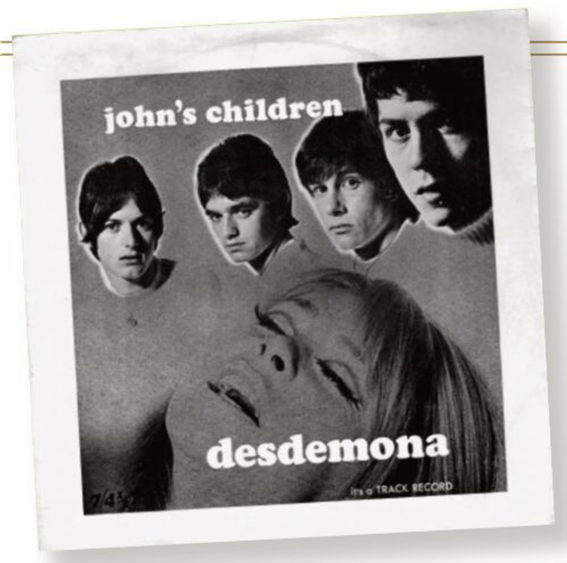
MARC BOLAN
Hippy Gumbo PARLOPHONE, JAN 1967

Ominous orchestral blues vision in which Bolan meets himself, chops himself into firewood then shoots himself in revenge. Unsurprisingly, very popular with John Peel.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

JOHN'S CHILDREN
Desdemona TRACK, MAY 1967

"Lift up your skirt and fly..." The



mighty Andy Ellison takes lead vocal on this freakbeat classic but Marc's wavering backing vocals and feedback guitar mayhem are the real takeaway here. We're certainly not in any danger of forgetting who wrote it.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
Debora

REGAL ZONOPHONE, APRIL 19, 1968

Even while babbling and bongoing down Middle Earth, Tyrannosaurus Rex were a minor sensation; their very first single, a febrile folk ode to a zebra-like muse, bothered the bottom end of the UK Top 40.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 34; US -

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
One Inch Rock

REGAL ZONOPHONE, AUGUST 1968

The rhythmic rock'n'roll roots of glam, and Bolan's vaudevillian slant, were in evidence on this spartan prototype, concerning the problems of Lilliputian love. Another gem, and when combined with "Debora" for a 1972 re-release, it made the Top 10.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 28; US -

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
Pewter Suitor

REGAL ZONOPHONE, JANUARY 25, 1969

Lacking the lyrical focus of its predecessors, Tyrannosaurus Rex's third single was something of a throwaway ditty.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
King Of The Rumbling Spires

AUGUST 9, REGAL ZONOPHONE, 1969

Virtually heavy metal before Black Sabbath were even out of the blocks, "...Rumbling Spires" saw Bolan go electric with the regal menace of a Mordor emperor amassing orc armies.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 44; US -

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
By The Light Of A Magical Moon

REGAL ZONOPHONE, JANUARY 16, 1970

Hints of pagan nuptial abound in this subtler marriage of folk and rock, a transitional track as T.Rex saddled up the swan. B side: "Find A Little Wood". Obviously.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

T.REX
Ride A White Swan

FLY, OCTOBER 9, 1970

T.Rex's breakthrough hit remained steeped in Bolan's '60s whimsy, envisioning a boogie wizard casting

spells from the back of a Trumpeter. Written, Bolan would claim, while spiked with LSD.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 76

T.REX
Hot Love

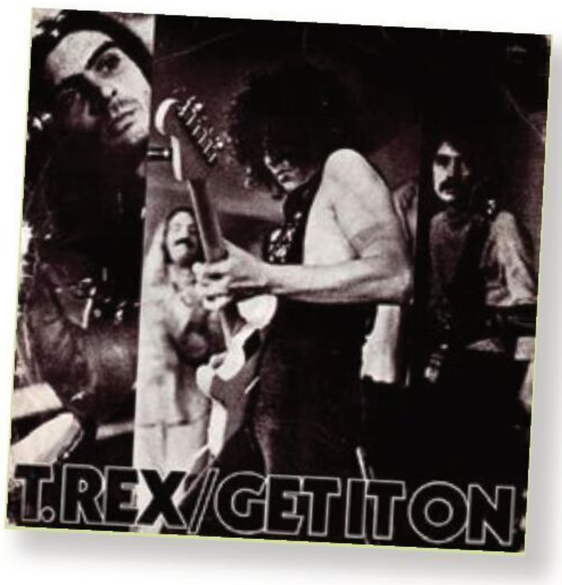
FLY, FEBRUARY 12, 1971

Strings, glitter, satin and swing; T.Rex's first UK chart-topper mingled soul with boogie rock to euphoric effect and marked the launch of the glam aesthetic.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 72

TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

T.REX
Get It On FLY, JULY 2, 1971
A second No 1! Co-opting a honky-tonk riff from Chuck Berry's "Little Queenie", Bolan tempted America



with the definitive glam track, renamed "Bang A Gong (Get It On)" in the States to avoid confusion with a single by jazz rockers Chase.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 10

T.REX
Jeepster FLY, NOVEMBER 5, 1971
Swapping hobbits for road hogs and putting pedal to glam's metal, Bolan Americanises further for the second and final single from *Electric Warrior*.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US -

T.REX
Telegram Sam
T.REX WAX CO, JANUARY 21, 1972
It's a hat trick! Assembling a colourful cast of the golden-nosed, jungle-faced and generally all right, Bolan created a timeless rock enigma – was Bolan's "main man" his accountant Sam Alder or manager Tony Secunda? Was the "natural born poet" Dylan, and Purple Pie Pete his publicist BP Fallon? Reports vary.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 67

T.REX
Metal Guru
T.REX WAX CO, MAY 13, 1972
The fourth and final No 1. Honouring '60s spirituality in a very '70s fashion, Bolan described the Lennon-like "Metal Guru" as "a festival of life song" referencing "all the gods all around".
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US -

T.REX
Children Of The Revolution
EMI, SEPTEMBER 8, 1972
Notebooks out, Queen. Originally recorded with Elton John on piano

and Ringo on drums for *Born To Boogie*, then expanded to 12 minutes during sessions for *The Slider*, this third version of Bolan's righteously seamy soul-storm was the charm, the sound of the hippie generation getting heavy and fighting back.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US -

T.REX
Solid Gold Easy Action
EMI, DECEMBER 9, 1972
The song that launched a thousand glitter stomps, "Solid Gold..." was amongst Bolan's most bare-faced '50s homages, lashing a raucous rock'n'roll clatter to animalistic post-'60s teenage lust.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US -

T.REX
20th Century Boy
EMI, MARCH 10, 1973
Yeooow! Glam's greatest brag tune, "20th Century Boy" found Bolan

borrowing some of Muhammad Ali's best lines for a characteristically brazen self-portrait. Marc got so into it that there was originally three minutes of jamming on the end.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US -

T.REX
The Groover EMI, JUNE 16, 1973
Essentially marking the end of T.Rex's imperial phase, the lizard-loined "The Groover" would be the last single to reach the UK Top 10 in Bolan's lifetime.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 4; US -

BIG CARROT
Blackjack EMI, AUGUST 25, 1973
"Produced by Bolan" the ad announced discreetly, but anyone buying this would have found there was more to it. Namely singers Gloria Jones and Stephanie Spruill backed by Marc, Mickey Finn, Steve Currie and Bill Legend. Short on song, but long on glam reggae.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

T.REX
Truck On (Tyke)
EMI, NOVEMBER 24, 1973
Bolan would claim this relatively unfocussed piece of glam disco as an act of self-sabotage: "I wanted something not so good to happen to

compare [future material] to."
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 12; US -

MARC BOLAN AND T.REX
Teenage Dream
EMI, FEBRUARY 9, 1974
Tinged with regret as his star began to fade, Bolan nonetheless concocted one of his most opulent singles in this mirror ball elegy to the death of idealism in a broken world. An anthem for the *Rocky Horror* age, originally attributed to Marc Bolan and T.Rex.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 13; US -

T.REX
Light Of Love EMI, JULY 13, 1974
Minus Visconti, Bolan explored a more clipped and edgy feel on this cheery fulcrum of the *Bolan's Zip Gun/Light Of Love* era.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 22; US -

T.REX
Zip Gun Boogie
(EMI, NOVEMBER 1, 1974)
Initially credited as a solo single, "Zip-Gun Boogie" felt like a weary water-treader and failed to catch the public imagination.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 41; US -

T.REX
New York City EMI, JULY 12, 1975
A frog stands out on Broadway? As if already mimicking NYC's punk snarl, the grandiose, synth-swaddled first single from *Futuristic Dragon* revived Bolan's sass, swagger and lyrical playfulness.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 15; US -

T.REX
Dreamy Lady
EMI, SEPTEMBER 26, 1975
Released as T.Rex Disco Party, Bolan further grooved with the times on this seductive disco warbler, although the demos were decidedly more reggae.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 30; US -

T.REX
London Boys
T.REX WAX CO, MARCH 6, 1976
Rescued from Bolan's aborted rock operas 'Billy Super Duper' and 'The London Opera' and featuring Bolan vocals slipping easily between Stateside drawl and cockney chirrup, "London Boys" essentially predicted Supergrass.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 40; US -

T.REX
I Love To Boogie EMI, JUNE 19, 1976
Stating the blindingly obvious with an infectious retro charm, "I Love To Boogie" was deemed so similar to Webb Pierce's "Teenage Boogie" that rockabillies gathered on the Old Kent Road to burn copies of the single, perhaps contributing to the last

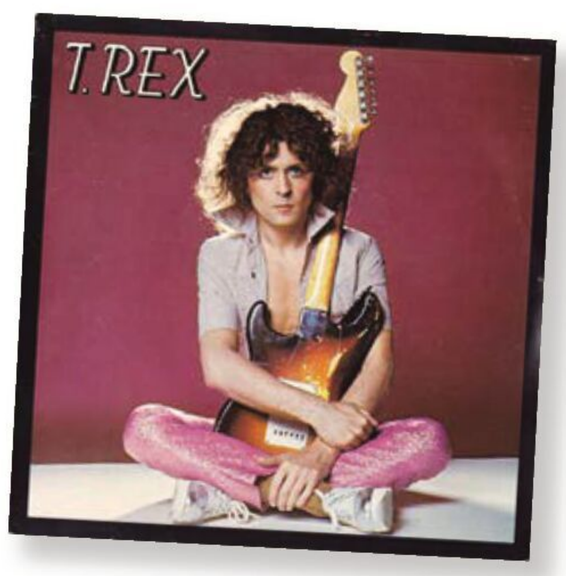
significant hit of Bolan's lifetime.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 13; US -

T.REX
Laser Love
T.REX WAX CO, OCTOBER 2, 1976
Marc's futuristic leanings spawned this spritely cracker in which Bolan appears to make wild, life-threatening love to a female robot.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 41; US -

MARC BOLAN & GLORIA JONES
To Know You Is To Love You
T.REX WAX CO, JANUARY 14, 1977
Alternatively titled "To Know Him Is To Love Him" depending on your territory, Bolan's duet with Jones on the Phil Spector standard had a vaguely festive feel to it, even though it was released in January.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

T.REX
The Soul Of My Suit
EMI, APRIL 2, 1977
"You pulled my love out by the root": a rare moment of vulnerability from Bolan, albeit confidently pasted to a hazy electro-pop trot-along.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 42; US -

T.REX
Crimson Moon EMI, APRIL 14, 1977
In the ...*Underworld*'s darker corners, Bolan played a growling *"chartreuse*

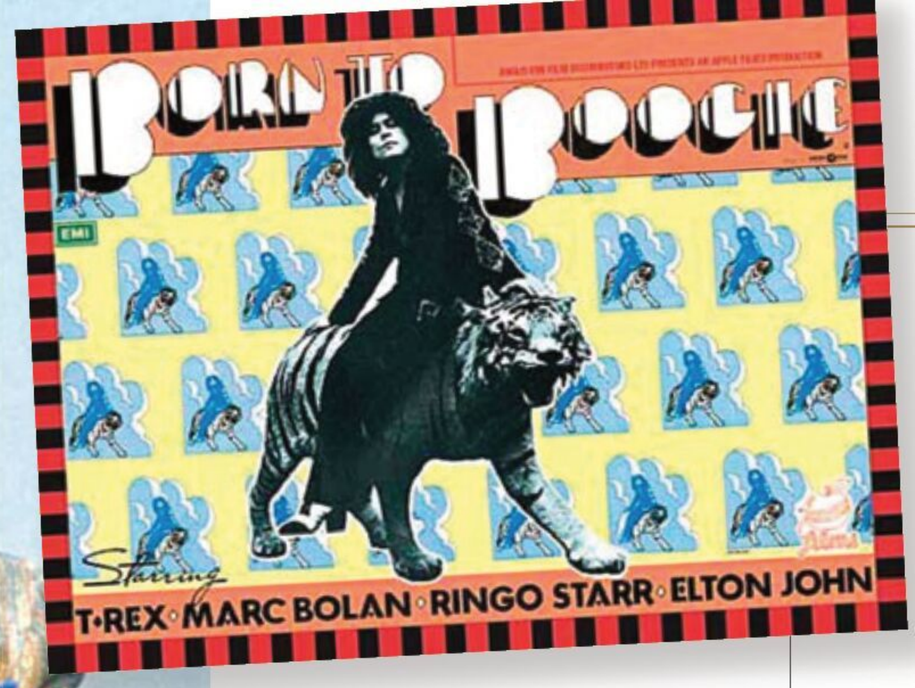


lover" and *"indigo man"* out to melt the mind of some unsuspecting waif to the tune of corroded boogie soul.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

T.REX
Dandy In The Underworld
EMI, MAY 30, 1977
Dandy In The Underworld's infernal doo-wop title track was this prince of players' last great moment of mythical self-aggrandisement.
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

T.REX
Celebrate Summer
EMI, AUGUST 1977
Restyling himself as a punk forefather for the sunny final single of his life, Bolan never mastered the cynicism but certainly nailed the amphetamine pace and cacophonous solos. **HIGHEST CHART POSITION:** UK - ; US - ✪

Starr and Bolan filming *Born To Boogie*, Denham Airfield, Bucks, March 1972



A MARCH NIGHT'S SCENE

Your shot-by-shot guide to Marc's concert film, *Born To Boogie*.

BOLAN and Ringo. When they met, it was... mutual appreciation. It also led to *Born To Boogie*, an Apple film which sat the former Fab drummer in the director's chair for a concert film that isn't quite a concert film.

Instead, it's a live show interspersed with short interludes: fantasy sequences recalling *Magical Mystery Tour* which attempt to honour Bolan's hippy cosmology, and a celebrity Marc/Elton/Ringo jam session which helps illustrate his place in the new pop hierarchy.

Current (excellent) releases of the film on DVD add the two (matinee and evening) March 18, 1972 shows at Wembley Empire Pool, which are possibly more revealing of the scale of Bolanmania. Here wonderful pre-show footage catches – in short order – *NME*'s Nick Kent, a vendor selling psychedelic bootleg Bolan posters, female fans staring into camera, and a fight. As Marc and Ringo (try) to say, some people like to rock, some people like to roll.

But what actually happens in the film?

Scene 1 >> 11 mins

We open on snapshots of a very young Mark Feld, then as a young man with guitar, then Marc onstage. The image unfreezes to a hot "Jeepster" performance, Marc surrounded by images of himself: on a backdrop, even on his T-shirt.

Ringo's intention is clearly to show some of the "Beatlemania" aspects of the show but you don't get much of an indication of the size or enthusiasm of the crowd. The band is pretty tight.

They play "Baby Strange" and Marc owns the stage, as banners are waved. Watching today the overdubbed guitar solos and backing vocals are at odds with the footage: there's no-one else on stage, after all.

A security guard fights a losing battle to get people to calm down.

Scene 2 >>14 mins

Ringo indulges his experimental side as he allows the camera to roll on a car slowly driving towards the camera. The car contains Marc in a "mad hatter" hat, and Ringo Starr. Sorry, Marc and a mouse with a beard. A dwarf appears and eats the car's wing mirror. Well obviously, sigh typecast dwarves in fantasy sequences everywhere.

Scenes 3 and 4 >> 18 mins

Cut to an all-star jam on "Tutti Frutti" with Elton and Ringo. The UK's most affluent rock'n'roll aficionados. Of course there's a small toy zebra and a taxidermied tiger. Neither of these, however, are quite as scary as Ringo's mullet.

The All-star jam continues with "Children Of The Revolution".

Scene 5 >>19 mins

"I look to the left it's black/I look to the right it's white". Back outside on top of their car, Bolan and Ringo improvise a ditty together.

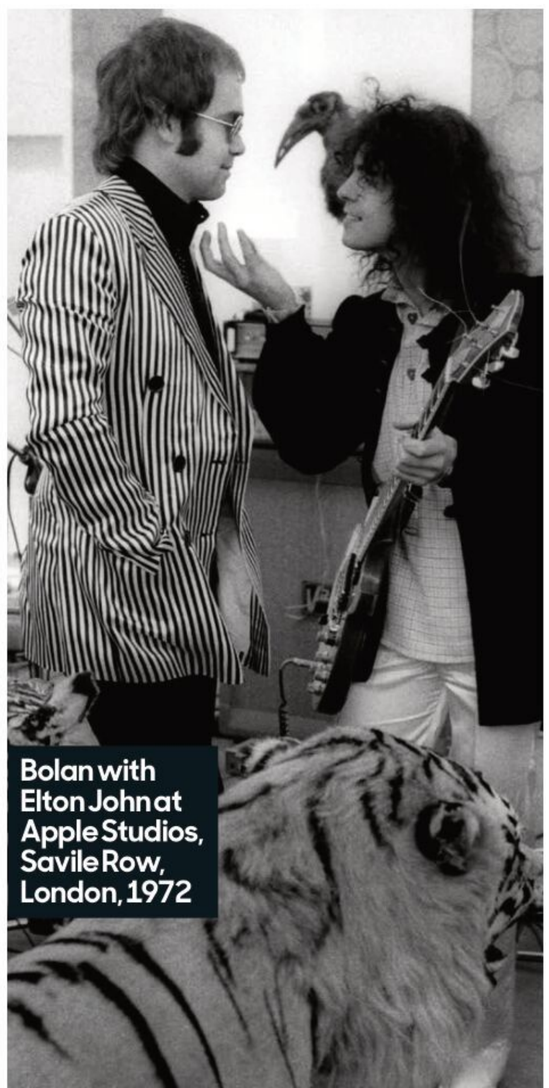
Scene 6 >>24 mins

Back on stage, Marc is playing "Spaceball Ricochet". He is now cross-legged and acoustic, and attempting to deal with a floppy microphone.

Scene 7 >> 24 mins 30 secs

Outside, Ringo and Marc try and improvise a funny bit to camera while utterly failing to keep a straight face.

Marc: "Some people like to rock"
Ringo: "Some people like to roll"
Marc: (dissolves in laughter)



Bolan with Elton John at Apple Studios, Savile Row, London, 1972

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS

Scene 8 >>28 mins

Back on stage at Wembley things are still pretty good: it's "Telegram Sam"!

"Rock on," says Marc, coolly to the audience. "You feeling all right, yeah?"

Scene 9 >>30 mins

Marc and Ringo are still trying to nail their bit, but getting no further.

"Some people like to rock..."
Ringo: "The light's going..."
They give up.

Scene 10 >> 34 mins

Marc is cross-legged again. "A song a lot of people ask for, for Mark, our roadie's kid... a song called 'Cosmic Dancer'". Always a good song, with a nice bongo jam at the end.

Scene 11 >> 41 mins

The famous "Tea Party" scene, filmed in John Lennon's garden at Tittenhurst Park, Ascot. Ringo liked the place so much he bought it from Lennon the following year. Present: Marc, Mickey Finn, Ringo, some nuns, and a waiter (Brit acting stalwart Geoffrey Bayldon, aka Catweazle). There is a string quartet who accompany Marc in a medley of hits: including "Jeepster" and "Get It On". "The Slider", particularly, is fantastic. Relieved of musical responsibility, Mickey Finn makes a mess of eating some jelly.

Scene 12 >>57 min

"Hot Love". The camera finds a serious young man rooted to his seat as if he expected to be watching ELP.

"It's the first time we've played in England for about six months," Marc tells them all. "It's such a groove to be back."

Tambourines are flung into crowd as T.Rex play "Get It On". Marc is hugged by a male stage invader. The great musicality of Steve Currie is audible even amid the din.

Marc attacks the guitar with tambourine, which is a superb noise. There is a crescendo of bongo bacchanalia, which Bill Legend brings back into something like a glam rock stomp as Marc indulges his Hendrix vibes.

And... roll credits. ***JOHN ROBINSON***

RUMBLING KINGS

The ebb and flow of Marc Bolan's friendship with David Bowie, in graph form

1964
Bowie (then Jones) and Bolan (still Feld) meet to paint the office of their manager/promoter Leslie Conn. A friendship is formed, but the decorating remains unfinished.

1968/MAY/JUNE
Bowie performs mime in support of Tyrannosaurus Rex at Middle Earth.

1969/FEB-MARCH
Bowie again supports Tyrannosaurus Rex as a mime act at several UK dates, having been instructed by Marc "not to sing". Bowie performs his 'Yet-San And The Eagle' mime, a consciousness-raiser for Tibet.

1969/NOVEMBER
Bowie's "Space Oddity" spends 14 weeks on the chart, peaking at No 5. Bolan isn't delighted.

1970/JAN 8
Recording Bowie's "The Prettiest Star". Bolan's wife June Child says that he is too good to be playing session guitar on a Bowie song (even one thought to be as much about Bolan as Angie). Bowie in 1976 recalled: "I liked some of the mistakes he was making."

1970/MARCH 11
Bowie and The Hype play a gig at The Roundhouse as part of the Atomic Sunrise festival. Hype drummer John Cambridge recalled Marc standing at the front of the stage in his Woolworth's gladiator breastplate clearly thinking, 'I'll have some of that'.

1970/NOV 4
Release of *The Man Who Sold The World*. Contains "Black Country Rock", featuring Bowie's spot-on, affectionate-we think-imitation of Bolan's voice.

1972/"LADY STARDUST"
Originally called "Song For Marc". At London's Rainbow Theatre in August 1972, Bowie apparently sang the song with an image of Marc projected behind him.

1973 JULY/*CREEM* INTERVIEW
Marc lowers the tone of the love-in somewhat when he tells Cameron Crowe in that July's *Creem* magazine that though he has "played on a lot of his records" Marc doesn't "consider David to be even remotely near big enough to give me any competition".

1974/SEPTEMBER
Bolan attends Bowie's LA Ampitheatre shows, a tacit admission that he had not broken the US while Bowie had. Bowie, said a member of his team, "didn't gloat" and was "very kind".

1975/LA HOUSE.
In 1977 Marc claims that Bowie stayed in "his house" in LA while resident in the city but there doesn't seem much evidence to support this.

1977/SEPT 7
Marc TV show. Bowie appears on Marc's upbeat pop show. The pair are in good spirits, attempting to jam a new number ("Sleeping Next To You") with which they close the show. And given that Marc's band (including Herbie Flowers) are no mugs, the song sounds pretty good. Sadly Marc falls off stage, which draws things to a close, but the pair are having a blast.

1977 MARCH
Bowie stays at Marc's flat on the Iggy tour. Bowie was known to like to conserve a quid on occasion. When on tour with Iggy he stayed at Bolan's London flat at 142 Upper Richmond Road West after the London dates. Iggy stayed in a hotel.

1977/SEPT 20
Bowie flies in from Switzerland to attend Bolan's funeral at Golders Green Crematorium. He gives Bolan's ex-wife June Child a lift home.

1977-1992
Bowie looks after Bolan's son Rolan (his godson) in the aftermath of Marc's death in a car accident. When June Child dies, Rolan inherits Bolan's estate.

VIBES
FAME BOWIE
FAME BOLAN

SEVEN INCH ROCK

A guide to the Marc after-market. *By Mark Bentley*

IN common with many commercially successful artists, Marc Bolan's headline collectables are found in the earlier, darker corners of his career. The parallels with Bowie are inescapable: a long haul to fame, signposted by a handful of '60s singles on various labels – which all tanked, and have long held holy grail status.

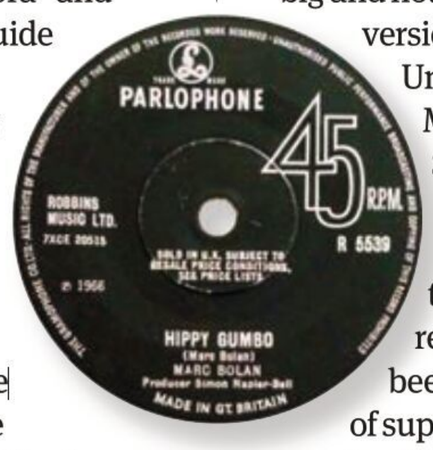
We mean, of course, 1965-6 Decca singles "The Wizard" and "The Third Degree" – both valued at £300+, if you ever find a standard original copy. The Columbia John's Children singles are all £100+ items as a guide. Then there's the insanely rare 1966 solo 7" on Parlophone, "Hippy Gumbo". This makes £1000+, with one seller listing it on Discogs as we speak for £2,750. A copy of "Midsummer's Night Scene" went for four grand four years ago. As a rule with Bolan product, it's the mega-rare promo or test pressings that fetch four figures.

Some UK examples from the Tyrannosaurus Rex period. Demo/promo versions of "Debora" and "One Inch Rock" hold guide prices in the thousands, but your chances of ever finding one are pretty much nil. Compare that to standard pressings, which kick in around £15+, with "Pewter Suitor" and "King Of The Rumbling Spires" a little sharper. £50 in top condition?

The promo-mania trend continues through the '70s for other standout items: the purple-label "Electric Warrior Preview" 7", say (£300+ ballpark) or the promo version of "Chariot Choogle" (£400+). Typically, your standard UK singles – in those cool branded T.Rex sleeves – are plentiful, and cost a couple of quid. More interesting to collectors are picture sleeve pressings, of hits big and not so big. The UK p/s versions of "Dandy In The Underworld", "Crimson Moon" or "Celebrate Summer" look positively cheap at £10.

One key trend of the past decade – regardless of artist – has been the increasing value of superb-condition first-pressing LPs. For T.Rex, this means the UK *Electric Warrior*, as it arrived in September 1971, with portrait inner sleeve and a free fold-out poster. We're now seeing this on virtual record shop walls across the world at £150+, doubling and then some for near mint versions. Mint copies of *The Slider* and *Tanx* are worth £70 or so. Meanwhile, the three-way fold-out latticed-sleeve versions of *Zinc Alloy...* – in one guise, a competition freebie for the magazines *Pink* and *Mirabelle* – can make hundreds.

As you might expect for a late superstar, items with a provable, personal connection are hugely desirable. An authenticated autograph will add value to an LP/concert stub/bus ticket. Genuine items of Bolan's clothing have turned up at auction houses through the years. But in late 2019, Bonhams offered a lovely lot, including Marc's notepad with handwritten notes, lyrics, sketches and poems, once owned by the Marc Bolan Appreciation Society. The price? £2,550 for a premium piece of glam rock history. ✪ ***MARK BENTLEY***



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

STOP ME

If you've heard this one before

MM's **CHRIS WELCH** recalls his friendship with **MARC BOLAN**... from bongos at Toadstool Studios to champagne in Little Venice

I FIRST saw Marc play at the Glad Rag Ball in 1965 at the Empire Pool. I'd heard about him, but never met him. He had a Donovan cap on and an acoustic guitar playing at the side of the stage. In the centre you'd have The Who and the Ted Heath Orchestra, all these big acts. He didn't go down terribly well, because people didn't know him and he didn't have a band or anything. I remember wandering round to watch him, I expect he played "The Wizard". The audience were young fashion students with a sprinkling of mods.

He looked quite confident even if there weren't many people listening – I always felt sorry for Marc, audiences were either ecstatic and hysterical or ignoring him. He was signed to Decca, people were sending out press releases about him. He came up to the office to see Penny Valentine on *Disc* – she was the star pop writer of the day. *Melody Maker* was in one room, *Disc* in the other. I said, "Hi, how are you?" and told him I'd seen him play.

He had this corkscrew hair and was wearing a red and black school blazer – he looked like a cartoon character. I told him he looked like Pansy Potter The Strongman's Daughter from the *Dandy* comic. He laughed at that and we became friends, really. Marc was so self-confident, from the age of about nine, he thought he was going to be Elvis Presley. He was great: good-looking, unique vocal style.

There was a pub next door to the office, the Red Lion, and I used to take bands in there at lunchtime. I met him there with John's Children but Marc wasn't very happy – he was writing all the songs, they were getting all the attention. Marc was too small to drink lots of beer – he would have a Coke.

On another occasion, again in the Red Lion, he told me about his new group, which was going to be called Tyrannosaurus Rex. He said, "We're going to be the biggest band in the world." Then he said, "We've bought the equipment in Woolworths." They had a Chad Valley toy drumkit, a set of bongos and a Bontempi organ.

I saw him at Middle Earth and at the first Isle Of Wight festival in 1968. It was freezing cold, blowing a gale, no facilities. You could never see Marc on these huge stages as he'd be sitting on the floor cross-legged, playing acoustic guitar – he wanted to be accepted as a serious songwriter. John Peel was there. It was very strange when Marc dropped Peel – John went to gigs with them, was their DJ. When "Ride A White Swan" came out, Peel saw it as a betrayal of the hippy dream to want to be this monster rock star. When John didn't support him in that Marc was very angry.

WHEN MARC BECAME A SUPERSTAR, EVERYONE WHO'D EVER MOCKED HIM HAD TO EAT THEIR WORDS

I only once saw Marc in a bad mood. I saw him in the Speakeasy and he was sitting at the bar on his own, and he was angry as no-one was playing "Ride A White Swan". But that's when everything changed, and he became a superstar – everyone who'd ever mocked him had to eat their words. It was a bit of a shock, even for me, when he made it.

I used to go round to his flat in Blenheim Crescent – no bathroom, no hot water, right at the top of the house. It was about three pounds a week, which he shared with his girlfriend June Child. I played bongos with him up there. He had a little studio, which was a corner of the kitchen with a curtain pulled across it. He'd made a little sign that said "Toadstool Studios".

Glam was all built around hit singles. And Marc came up with great hit singles. Cynics at the time said he was cannibalising old rock'n'roll themes, which of course he was – and his singles did come to sound very similar. But he had a whole new audience of teenage girls who just fell in love with him. In a way it was rebranding old rock'n'roll and making it outrageous. Marc happily fitted into that.

When he became a big star, he became over-confident – but he had fought hard, for a long time. When he became famous I went and saw him at this huge house in Little Venice. He'd moved into this beautiful place with a Rolls-Royce outside, and I had to fight my way through all these fans and press, all hoping for a glimpse of him. I went in and he just cried "Champagne!" It was payback time. People had to swallow their words.

Later I was with him in the States, and he was on the same bill as Humble Pie, trying to conquer America. He was going down very badly. We went back on the same plane and I said, "How do you think the tour went?" And he said, "Oh it was sensational." But clearly it wasn't – he'd never admit anything like that. He was strong and determined. He would fight back. ✪

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES

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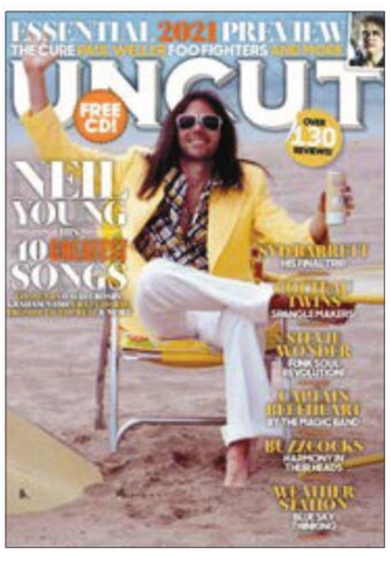

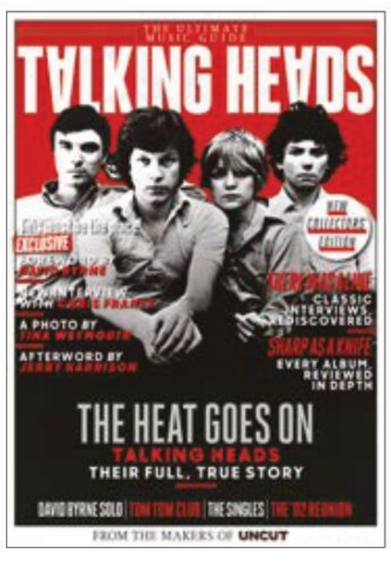

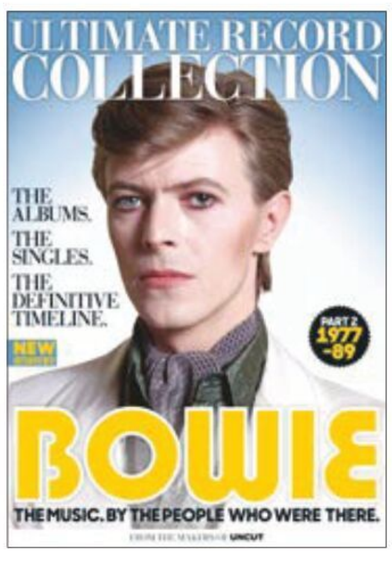

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